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CHRISTIAN COURIER

December 22, 2008 A Reformed Biweekly No. 2855 $2.00

Christian education in Haiti: hope in the midst of despair ... p.13

Journal of a Dutch immigrant ...p. 15

63rd year of publication

All those letters to God find a home

Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM – Once a year, usually just before Hanukkah and Christmas, a handful of Jerusalem postal workers leave their dreary letter-sorting station for a few hours and head to the Western Wall. Boxes in hand, they haul the thousands of letters addressed to "God, Jerusalem Israel," "the Almighty," or "the Wailing Wall," among others.

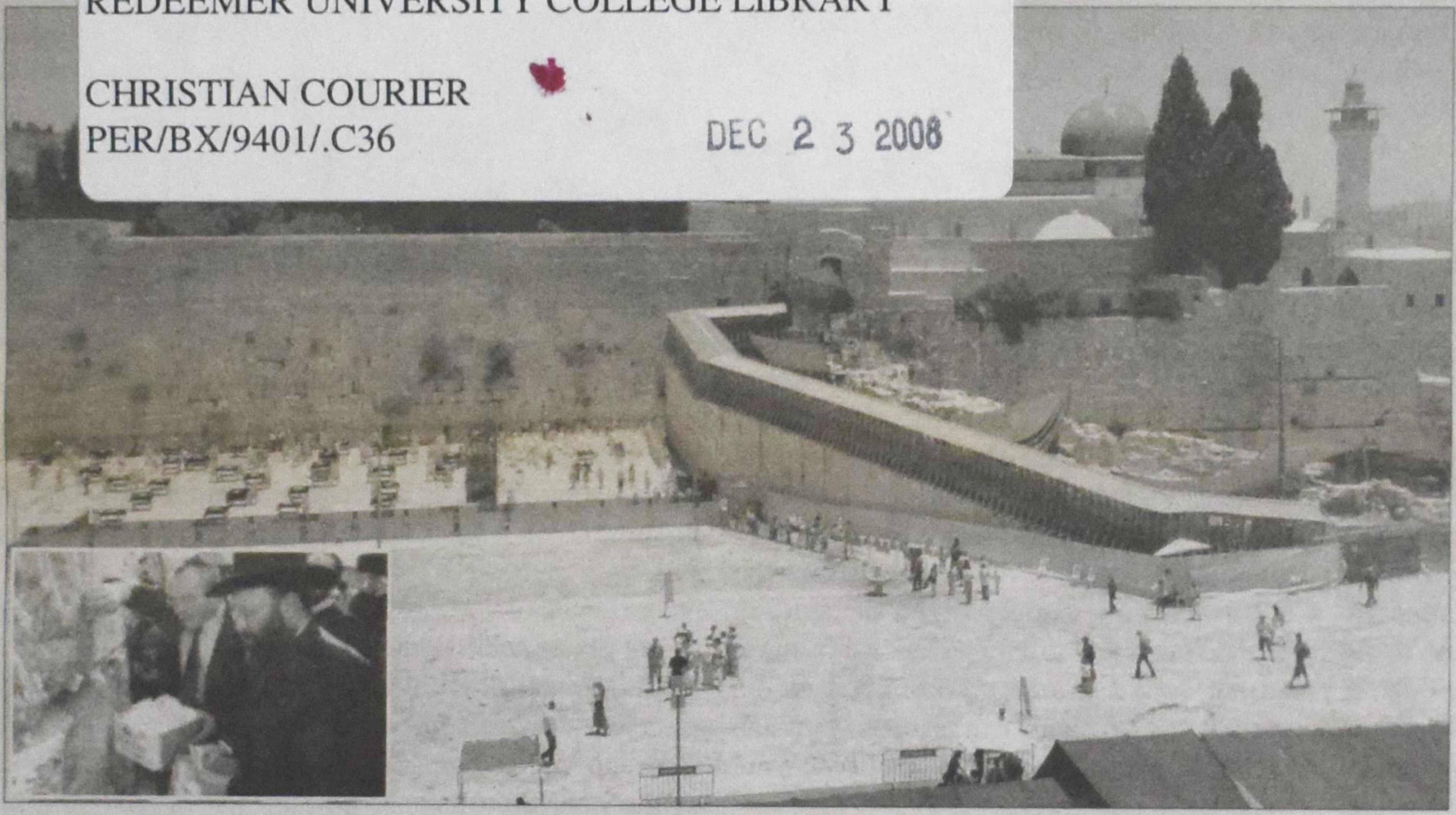
At the wall, the second-holiest in Judaism after the adjoining Temple Mount, the workers separate by gender, going either to the men's or women's prayer sections. An arm's length from the wall's ancient stones, where dozens of people are deep in prayer, they carefully open the envelopes, fold the letters until they are slivers and insert them into the crevices.

Jewish pilgrims and others have been performing this ritual for centuries, and the postal workers take the job of delivering heartfelt prayers very, very seriously. Many Jews, as well as some followers of other Abrahamic faiths, believe God answers prayers inserted in the 2,000-year-old wall.

"If you live in Israel you can come to the Kotel [Western Wall] and place a prayer in the stones, but the people who wrote these letters live abroad," says Chana Arvatz, a postal worker, while inserting a letter between the stones. "It is a sacred responsibility, something I find very moving."

The letters arrive from dozens of countries, some of which, like Malaysia and Kuwait, do not have diplomatic ties with Israel. Most of the letters in today's pile appear to be in Russian, but English, Spanish, Italian and French are also represented.

"The majority come from Christians, but a sizable number come from Jews and even a few



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This larger picture picture of the Western Wall has an insert showing the Rabbi of the Western Wall Shmuel Rabinowitz (right) and Aviv Hochman, general manager of the Israel Postal Authority, place letters addressed to God in cracks of the Western Wall, one of Judaism's holiest sites.

from Muslims," says Avi Yaniv, who calls himself the manager of the "dead letters" department. "There are also quite a few letters to Santa Claus." From what Yaniv has heard, Israeli postal workers have been delivering letters addressed to God to the wall for 60 years, since the founding of the state.

Yaniv, a 65-year-old grand-father who some call "God's postman," says he is "always a bit surprised" to see Muslim prayers sent to Jerusalem "because Mecca and Medina are holier places, according to Islam."

Yaniv says he and his fellow postal workers read some of the letters before placing them in the wall, but are careful not to look at the senders' names out of respect for their privacy. "People tend to write to God when they're experiencing

See **Letters** *on page 3*

China reaches out to house churches; raids, arrests continue

DUBLIN (Compass Direct News) – In recent months Chinese officials have attempted to build bridges with the Protestant house church movement even as police raided more unregistered congregations, arrested Christian leaders and forced at least 400 college students to swear they would stop attending such worship services.

Two research institutes – one from the government – organized an unprecedented symposium on Nov. 21-22 that concluded with an agreement for house church leaders to begin a dialogue with government officials. A month earlier, the chairman of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement told a gathering of 200 Hong Kong church leaders of his desire to assist Chinese house churches and provide them with Bibles, according to Ecumenical News International.

Rights groups pointed to recent raids and arrests, however, as confirmation that Chinese authorities still restrict freedom of worship for local house church Christians. Police raided a house church gathering in Tai Kang county, Henan province on Dec. 3 and arrested all 50 Christians, the China Aid Association reported on Thursday (Dec. 4). Public Security Bureau officers also raided another gathering of 50 house church believers in Xiji town, Zaozhuang city, Shandong province on Dec. 2, arresting 20 Christian leaders.

A breakthrough for China's house churches?

by **Xu Mei**

At last month's symposium on Chinese house churches, officials from government research organs, scholars from government think-tanks and universities, independent researchers and an unprecedented delegation of six house church leaders from Beijing, Henan and Wenzhou attended. Participants discussed every aspect of the house church movement in China.

Statistics were a key issue, with most agreeing that the number of house church members was vast and rapidly increasing. Estimates ranged from 50 million to 100 million members of Protestant house churches, as compared with approximately 20 million members of registered Protestant churches.

Delegates were surprisingly bold in their discussion and criticism of China's religious policy, and several put forward practical plans for the abolition of institutions such as the State Administration for Religious Affairs (formerly the Religious Affairs Bureau) and the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement.

They also called for serious and ongoing discussions between the government and house churches, and Christian leaders called for the lifting of a ban on house churches and a review of restrictions on church registration and appointment of pastors.

Many participants agreed that the democratic management of house churches in accordance with the rule of law was a logical step to bring religious policies into line with China's open-door economic policies.

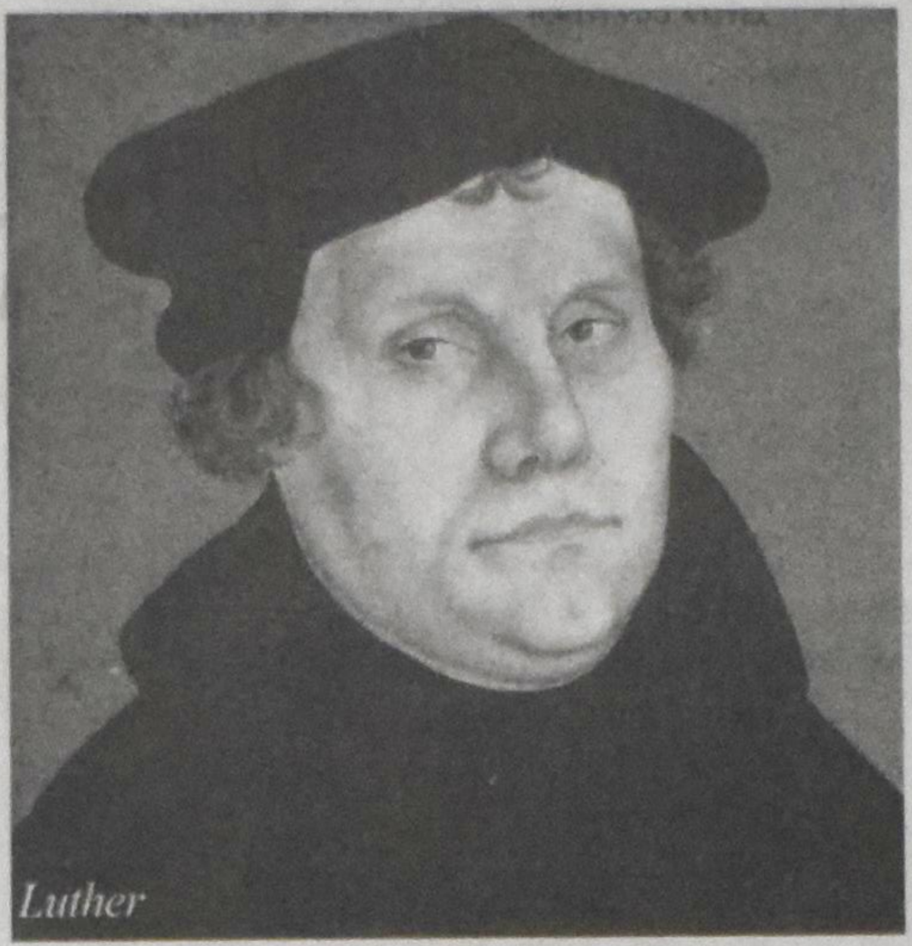
While certain sectors of leadership may welcome these suggestions, others entrenched in the atheist system of the Communist Party were expected to balk at such reforms.

History

Luther and work: integrating Sunday and Monday (Part I)

Bert den Boggende

In the ancient Greek-Roman world free people considered manual work degrading – an activity for slaves. It's in that world that Christianity appeared with two contradictory possibilities. Before the expulsion from paradise, work, including manual work, was a God-given, imaginative, life-fulfilling activity (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). However, as a result of the Fall, the ground was cursed and Adam was told that he would eat his food by the sweat of his brow (Genesis 3:17-19; cf. 5:29). Although not explicitly stated, Adam's work, which was turned into a hardship, also seems to have been cursed.



Luther

The church had difficulty balancing the two views: work as blessing and work as curse. Gradually the negative perspective combined with Greek-Roman negativism carried the day. The contemplative life became the model to which people ought to aspire. According to Gratian, the 12th century father of canon law, there were really two kinds of Christians: the clergy – possessing a divine office and given to contemplation and prayer and devoted to God – and the laity. With such a perspective it is no wonder that the Sunday became separated from the Monday. One of Luther's contributions was reconnecting Sunday with Monday.

The dualism coninues

In spite of his contribution, Sunday and Monday are currently often severed. According to Laura Nash and Scotty McLennan in *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday*, there is a pattern of alienation between the devout business person and the church. There are several reasons for this alienation, including the privatization of faith, the pluralistic nature of contemporary society, work leaving no time, work as a means of gaining status, and the pace of work.

But it is not only the business person who has not integrated Sunday with Monday. When I was a teenager, my mother hoped that I would become a minister, a vocation she regarded much more highly than others. Her perspective was really no different from that of our Catholic neighbours, who hoped that one of their sons and daughters would become a priest or a nun.

The editor of *Sojourner*, Jim Wallis, recently posited that some ministers preached that their parishioners should not vote in the American elections. Christianity and politics did not mesh, according to these ministers. Although not work related, it is still a form of severing Sunday from Monday.

Even in Calvinistic circles

Even in the budget of the Christian Reformed Church there is a slight touch of this severance. Foreign and home missions are paid for by ministry shares, but its deed mission, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), is supported only by voluntary contributions. There were reasonable arguments for that position when the CRWRC started some four decades ago with emergency help. But its mandate has changed, and the CRWRC is now also involved in ongoing activities unrelated to emergencies. For those ongoing activities one could expect quota contributions. Without explanations one can read the budget as having a touch of dualism, a Sunday-Monday break.

And a recent *CC* advertisement read "an opportunity to serve in part-time ministry." We know what it means, but in reality one cannot serve God part-time, and it subtly suggests that other work is not ministry. Moreover, in pietism and fundamentalism cum dispensationalism there is often a concern for the saving of souls and a lack of concern for workday activities. More examples could be added, but it should be clear that the separation of Sunday from Monday is still with us, and wittingly or unwittingly even in many churches. In the latter case we can perhaps speak, as Michael Bennethum does, of a two-tiered Christianity.

Luther's attempt to reconnect the days is thus not an interesting thought of, and for, the past, but relevant for us today. This article looks at Luther's contribution and his failure.

Negative view of merchants

Luther, born in 1483, lived at a time when hardly a decade passed without a peasant revolt. The European worldview expanded with Columbus' westward voyages. Commerce increased significantly. Luther wrote a fair amount about such peasant revolts and about commerce. When the peasants revolted in 1525, Luther wrote a scathing attack against these peasants in language that makes us shake our head. He called upon the princes to "strike, smite, strangle or stab, secretly or publicly" these peasants. He had a low opinion of commerce, associating it with usury, speaking about it in several pamphlets and sermons. "In Germany today," he complained, "some cities are notorious for usury, which is also a sin of Sodom." The traffic in interest he regarded as "the greatest misfortune of the German nation…. The devil invented it, and the Pope, by giving his sanction to it, has done untold evil throughout the world."

His list of sinners usually lumped usurers together with adulterers and murderers. Not surprisingly, he regarded the Fuggers, the bankers of emperor Charles V and king Philips II of Spain, as extortioners. His dislike is somewhat of a surprise, since, as recent archaeological research has shown, his parents were well-to-do. Father Hans was a mining capitalist. Did Luther psychologically react to his father's ambition? While admiring the life of the peasant and praising the labour of the honest craftsman, he only permitted trade as long as it was restricted to necessities and the seller demanded no more than would compensate him for his labour and risk. He condemned the new luxuries arriving from the East. In this regard Luther was still a man of the Middle Ages at a time the world was moving away from it. Although Nash and McLennan did not mention Luther, Luther continued the medieval separation of Sunday from Monday for a significant part of society.

Undeserving poor

Not only did he condemn merchants, he also condemned the idle. In his exposition of Gen. 18, and referring to 1 Tim. 5:16, he complained that there was "a very great supply [of vagrants] under the papacy" and that there was "no lack of idle hypocrites who are accustomed to begging; and if you give them a handout, they at once spend it on gambling and carousing." Idleness, like saints' days and monasteries, ought to be suppressed and vagrants, who were an unfair burden on the churches, ought to be either banished or forced to work.

This does not mean that Luther rejected charity; in fact, he encouraged towns to organize charity for the honest poor. Instead, Luther distinguished between the deserving and undeserving poor.

That Luther wrote extensively about these issues should not come as a surprise. He, like Catholics before him and Calvinists and Anglicans after him, held that social morality was a province of the church. He espoused what may be called a church-civilization in which everything – state, society, education, law, science, commerce, industry – were regulated in accordance with God's law. He may have split the church, but, basing himself upon Rom. 12 and 1 Cor. 12, he kept the notion that society was an organic whole.

(To be continued in the next issue.)

Bert den Boggende (bertdenb@yahoo.com), has a PhD in British history and is a retired teacher who still does some substituting. He lives in Brooks, Alberta.

At first glance the person depicted in this painting "Portrait of Anton Fugger" looks like a common citizen when in fact he was once considered the richest man in the world. During the late 15th century his uncle, Jakob Fugger known as "Jakob the Rich" of Augsburg, Germany, created a world wide mercantile, banking, and industrial empire. In 1525 Anton inherited the family business and continued to grow its holdings until his death in 1560.

During the sixteenth century, family banking firms rose to prominence. The Fuggers, marked by sharp banking skills, fortuitous marriages, and aristocratic dynasties in southern Germany, lent large loans to Charles V and in return was given monopolies over silver, copper, and mercury mines in the Hapsburg region. Technological advancements in shipbuilding, mining and metallurgy led to profits of over fifty percent per year. Jakob Fugger, known, as Jakob the Rich, acquired numerous land estates and brought the family to the class of social elites. However, when the Habsburgs failed to repay their loans, the House of Fugger went bankrupt.

Letters *...continued from page 1*

problems in their lives or want to change their situation. Some are very touching," he says somberly.

Of all the letters he has read over the years, Yaniv says he was particularly moved by one from a mother asking God to heal her son of alcoholism and drug abuse. Another, from a little boy, asked God to bring him a Harry Potter wizard's wand for Christmas. Many others ask for strength to confront challenges ranging from illness and unemployment to marital problems and sexual abuse.

Regardless of the religion of the sender, all letters addressed to God are taken to the Western Wall, says Avi Hochman, general manager of the Israel Postal Service. "Israel is a Jewish country and the Kotel is a sacred place. All people are welcome to pray here. We respect all minorities," Hochman says.

Like all of the messages placed in the wall's crevices, those addressed to God will eventually be collected by employees of the Western Wall Plaza and buried in the geniza, a repository for texts considered holy, such as the Torah and prayer books.

Although employees of the dead letters department handle more than their fair share of off-beat mail –the "Letters to God" cubbyhole stands right next to the cubbyhole for "Strange Letters" – the God letters hold a special place in their heart, they say.

"I'm religious myself, so this task gives me the opportunity to go to the Kotel and be part of it," says Iris Cohen, another letter sorter, glancing at the wall's golden stones. "I'm attached to this job."

"It is a privilege," agrees Yaniv. "In Jerusalem we feel very close to God, as if he is just a local call away."

Perspective

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman

A fresh take on Home Missions

It has been said that the word "home" is the most powerful word in the English language. That sounds accurate to me. It's one reason I like the name of my current employer: *Home* Missions.

The word is powerful because it names something lost or forgotten today. I've been joining the ranks of commuter cattle lately, being herded from airport to airplane to hotel to airport again. The drab, impersonal corridors can betray a sense of cosmic homelessness. In this culture of mobility and speed we are losing a sense for something close to the heart of our humanity: a place to love and nurture.

Brian Walsh and Steve Bouma-Prediger just published a book entitled *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement* (Eerdmans, 2008). In it they suggest that "diaspora, the stranger, and migrancy are the dominant metaphors of our time." We live in a culture that tends to "diss" place.

In the movie *The Terminal* (2004) an East European man named Viktor Navorski lands in New York. Unfortunately, because a revolution broke out in his countryjust after he left, U.S. security will not recognize his passport. So he cannot enter the country but neither can he go back home; so he stays in the airport for nine months. This drama is suspected to be loosely based on a true story of a man who was stuck in a Paris airport from 1988 until 2006.

A hellish experience, no doubt. In Job 2:2 God asks Satan, "From where do you come?" and Satan answers, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it." (KJV) An eternal restlessness plagues the spirit that has no place to call home; or even worse, no memory of it.

The biblical narrative as home

Students can be especially vulnerable to this drifting about. They are often far from their family of origin and uncertain about their future. Where they study is seldom where they will settle, and so they hang loosely on the land. These are their "odyssey years" now stretching all the way through their twenties; they could name them just as easily "the wilderness years." Wings without roots.

Walsh and Bouma-Prediger suggest in their book that the Bible is a story about God's home-making and home-coming in the midst of our home-breaking. God makes the earth as a home for us, but we violate its limits. Then, in sin, we try to make a home for ourselves apart from God, asserting our own wrong-headed self-protective home improvements. It is only when God makes his home in Jesus with us that we rest again in home. God's home-coming in Jesus redeems our home-breaking.

Think of this account of reality in itself as a home. Narratives can be shelters, too. Peter Berger published a book in the seventies entitled *Homeless Minds* describing how modern people have a hard time settling on one cosmic story that holds all the different cubicles of their life together. In this context, welcoming someone to your church is an invitation to home-coming. It is offering them an over-arching identity, an address for their soul.

Mission as home-making

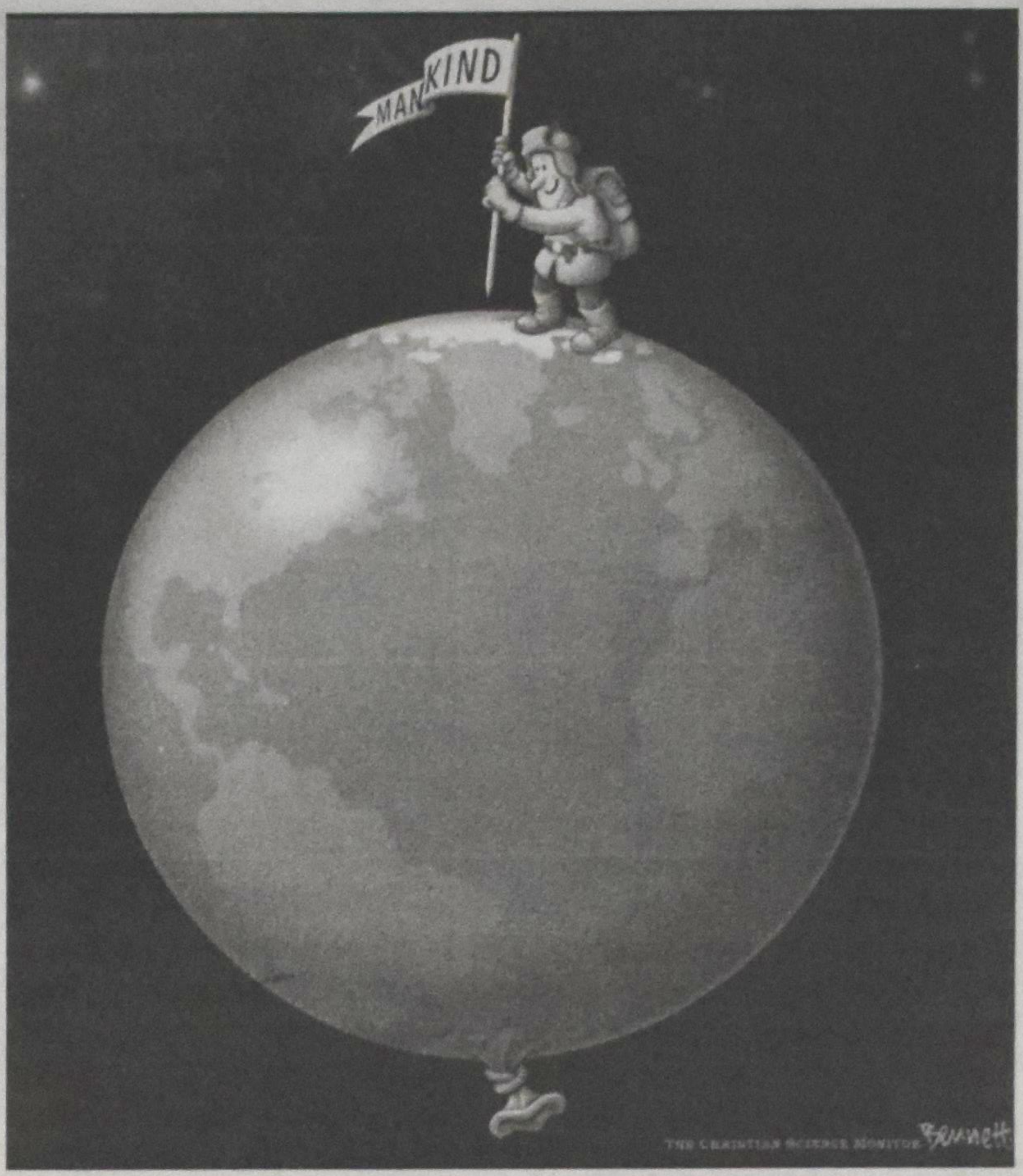
Home-*making*, however, needs to become a prime directive for our species. If this planet is our God-given home, we have both abused and neglected our place of,residence. Our migratory patterns lighten our care for any specific place, and thus we care for no place. We need to see our life as church member and citizen as a *home* mission in a whole new way.

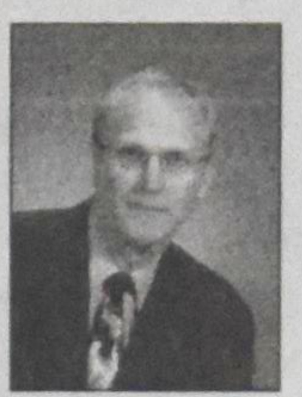
We can start where Viktor Navorski began when he was stranded in the airport. He immediately began to make friends with those nearest him. His surroundings were desolate in terms of home-like coziness, but he created a community around him who grew to love each other and the place itself. We need to start by becoming friends with our neighbourhood. By fostering good memories of a place, we grow to love that place and invest in its welfare.

Home is the most powerful word in the English language. There is no place like home. For those who have lost one, it survives in a deep longing for return. For those who have one, it calls for care, stewardship, and an open door.

(See "Coming Home" poem on p.7.)

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader. He resides in Guelph, Ontario.





Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.

Luke 2:14

From my family to yours,

Merry Christmas!

Clarence Weima

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Home-making in O'Hare

Peter Schurman

I was in Chicago's O'Hare airport this year rushing off to a connecting flight to who-remembers-where. I'm always impressed with O'Hare – just how tense, cagey, anxious and harried everyone appears to be.

It's quite understandable when you think about it. We are all about to give our lives up to a large metal tube that will soar 30,000 feet above our homes. We are worried about dying from a mechanical error or food poisoning or a scenario even worse yet: being late for a meeting. Even the drab grey walls speak of limbo.

I'm always a little nervous in airports. Elaborate security checks don't calm me. On this day nature called to me just around Gate G, and, eager to be as comfortable as possible on my flight, I tucked into the facilities near by.

What was about to happen shocked my sorry soul in a warm and wonderful way. I walked into this tiled washroom and heard this voice cheerfully singing "Sunny sky, blue skies, come my way…." When I get to the urinal area there is a man in a custodian uniform with blue rubber gloves on who says to me in the most inviting way:

"Nice 'n clean, here, killer. Don't you worry 'bout nuthin' here. Nice and clean for all you cats." Then he started whistling and cleaning and I heard him say to the next patron: "You do the ol' two step dancing here. One step up, and one step back. There ain't no urine on this floor."

I heard the new guy say something about being delayed four hours. The custodial reply: "I got you all set up here. This is yo house. You call the shots. You is my guest."

I was so impressed that I stood outside for awhile and recorded the interactions in my notebook. Another patron exiting the sparkling bathroom paused by me and spoke back into the washroom: "You got a good attitude, buddy."

The reply was energetic: "Hey, I get knocked down and I learn from it. You have a good night. I hope everything works out for ya.'"

The crowning finish, a priceless ending to the episode I could not have thought up myself was this: "I hope everythang works out for ya'. My name's John."

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Editorial

For the pagans run after these things

Bert Witvoet

A couple from Cochrane, Alberta, was featured in the news for having accomplished an incredible feat: they were able to save $7,000 and pay off $9,000 of their student loan after 11 months. Amazing, don't you think? How did they do it?

Tom and Malora Mulherns vowed to stop buying all non-essential items for a year, limiting themselves to food and some essential clothes. Instead of going to the mall they either traded with others or visited the local thrift store. Tom and Malora have a three-year-old child. Tom makes $48,000 as a youth pastor in a community church in Calgary. The couple wanted to simplify life and get off the consumer treadmill. They found the experience liberating as they spent time in the mountains instead of in malls, and had more family time available for themselves.

Maybe you snickered when I described their accomplishment as an incredible feat. Fifty years ago that kind of frugality was commonplace. But today it is deemed newsworthy. I can personally tell you about my mother, who, as a widow with seven children, came to Canada in 1950, practically penniless, but after five years had saved enough to own two houses. She did it with the income of four of her children; nevertheless, she was a shining symbol of frugality. Saving was a normal practice for those whose income exceeded the daily requirements of food and clothing.

Those post-war years were golden years from a spiritual point of view in many ways. The Canadian people had been chastened by the loss of thousands of young men as they fought to liberate others from the oppression of fascist regimes, and many of the immigrants had their own story to tell about war-torn Europe. Besides, consumerism had not yet been invented. People had learned to live with less.

On the treadmill

I couldn't help thinking of this young couple in connection with our current economic crisis. We all know how we got ourselves into this mess of a depressed economy. We spent beyond our means. We started living by credit rather than by faith. Saving is almost unheard of today. We are encouraged to buy things we absolutely don't need. Buying electronic gadgets has become an addiction for many. Easy credit in the form of sub-prime mortgages has lured many into bankruptcy. How are we going to get out of this?

What would happen if everybody in Canada followed the Mulherns and decided not to go the malls for a year, to buy only the essentials, to trade rather than buy, and to look for second-hand clothing instead of new? What would happen if everyone would try to save money and pay off their loans? I know what would happen. Our economy would totally collapse. It would spell the closing of the malls, the shutting down of all manufacturing plants, and the appearance of mile-long unemployment lines.

There is no way we can all step off the treadmill of consumerism without serious injury. Sad, isn't it? But it's true. If we could step off the treadmill in an orderly, leisurely, one-after-another manner that would take five years to complete, we might escape serious trouble. *Might*. The escape would mimic the way we got onto the mill, gradually, almost organically, to the tune of the increase in GNP (See note below). But it's an impossible scenario. We have spun out of control and we are going to get hurt as a society, along with other developed societies throughout the world.

Rush to disaster

This is why it's so discomfiting to hear that political parties are falling over each other trying to pressure their governments to bail out failing companies, especially the "Big Three automakers – to spend ourselves out of a recession. How can more spending, more irresponsibility, more exploitation of the environment, more living beyond our means save us? I am all for lessening the impact of the pain that accompanies a recession because the suffering, as usual, will be distributed very unevenly. But we have to do so much more than looking for a soft landing. We have to change our ways. And we have to realize that we must pay a penalty for our irresponsibility. We deserve our recession. Instead of rushing into bail-outs, let's take some time to figure things out. Collectively.

I notice that even economists don't agree on how to deal with this recession. Some say that the monetary stimulus by the Bank of Canada when it lowered its key lending rate to 1.5 per cent is enough stimulation. We don't need a fiscal stimulation from the government. Others disagree and insist that the government has to pull the economy out of its downward spiral. The government's hesitation to include economic stimuli in last month's fiscal update was apparently the reason why opposition parties felt the need to band together and try to defeat the government.

Pagan behaviour

Personally I wonder whether quick bail-outs prevent us from learning the most valuable lesson there is to be learned. How do we get back to that strange condition called living within our means? How do we live by the words of Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount – "Life is more than food and the body is more than clothes"? Right now our society is clamouring: "What shall we eat?" and "What shall we drink?" and "What shall we wear?" Do you know what Jesus says about that kind of preoccupation? "For the pagans run after all these things." That's right. Canadian society is acting as if Christianity never landed on its shores. We're a bunch of pagans, worrying that we cannot keep up the consumerist dream of buying the latest electronic gadget. It would be foolhardy to apply the next statement of Jesus: "For your heavenly Father knows that you need them." Jesus was talking about food and drink and clothing, airhead, not I-pods and flat-screen TVs. Jesus wants us to first seek his kingdom and his righteousness. Yes his kingdom includes technology, but not planned obsolescence and wrong priorities. And his righteousness includes fiscal and monetary justice for the poor, but not over-production of fuel inefficient vehicles.

But what do I know? I'm not an economist. I'm just a scribbler who always gets nauseous when the merry-go-round starts speeding up. No wonder the thought of bail-outs make me feel dizzy.

The Mulherns decided to stop going around the mulberry bush. Since there is no danger of all of us collectively following their example, why don't we as followers of Jesus try their experiment and see what happens? New Year's resolution, anyone?

Note: A tricky move almost everyone missed...

In 1991 the GNP was turned into the GDP – a quiet change that had very large implications. Under the old measure, the Gross National Product, the earnings of a multinational firm were attributed to the country where the firm was owned and where the profits would eventually return. Under the Gross Domestic Product, however, the profits are attributed to the country where the factory or mine is located, even though they won't stay there. This accounting shift has turned many struggling nations into statistical boomtowns, while aiding the push for a global economy. Conveniently, it has hidden a basic fact: the nations of the North are walking off with the South's resources and calling it a gain for the South.

About compacts and conspiracies

For more information on the experiment of not shopping see the website www.ourcompactlife.com. It explains how the Mulherns were featured in various media (click on "emergent journey"). You can also read about the Advent Conspiracy, a group that is "trying to encourage people to spend less on presents and more on those in need." They, too, want to escape consumerism. Here you will read items such as the following:

"It is simply appalling that our greed has reached the point where we will literally trample people to death to get a deal on something. When the stuff that we consume, consumes us and turns us into robots with no concern for anything other then what we can get, we have become a hopeless society.

"If you have read the news reports about this worker in a New York Wal-Mart who was trampled to death, you have no doubt been struck by the absolute absurdity of this situation. Shoppers ripped the doors off of their hinges and then proceeded to trample an employee of the store. None of the savage shoppers stopped to help him. They continued to shop despite the fact that a man had lost his life in the mad dash. Police finally ushered shoppers out of the store with their possessions in hand.

"People continued to shop! What have we become? This is absolutely insane!"

As you can see, there is a new movement afoot that wants to put "His Kingdom" at the top of the shopping list.

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Founded in 1945

An independent bimonthly that seeks to: report on significant events in the Christian community and the world; express opinions infused by Scripture and rooted in a Reformed perspective; provide contact for the Christian community.

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Web site: www.christiancourier.ca
Phone: 905-682-8311
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Publications Mail Registration No. 09375

We acknowledge the assistance of the Government of Canada, through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

Canada

Keep the vision going

I'm quite encouraged by comments from readers I meet. They are glad that we are continuing. They tell me that *Christian Courier* is important for the Reformed community.

One reader wrote: "We were happy and grateful to read that you will continue to publish the *Christian Courier* and pray for all of you as you endeavour to hire a new Editor." (She wrote this before she had read about the appointment of three coeditors).

Why is *Christian Courier* important for the Reformed community? For some organizations it's the only outlet they have besides their own newsletter. Our community has spawned the Christian school movement, the Christian Labour Association of Canada, the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, Christian Stewardship Services, CRC Extension Fund and many more. These organizations are important not only for their own sake, but they represent a perspective that encourages cultural involvement by Christians.

Someone I know asked why we can't combine *Christian Courier* with the *Banner.* The answer is simple: we have different assignments. *The Banner* is a denominational magazine that focuses on church life. We are a non-denominational paper that addresses society and culture.

Christians are not primarily church-going people; they are earth-keepers and relationship builders. Christians represent the Church of Christ at work and worship. We are artists and plumbers who look to the cultural mandate with a sense of urgency, acknowledging the right of God to expect a good day's work in the Kingdom. We punch in with prayer, and we punch out with gratitude.

Please keep the mission of Christian journalism going. Talk about it with your friends and children.

Bert Witvoet

PS: See gift subscription ad on page 20.

An important ministry

In response to "Whither CC?" (November 24) I write the following: Among the various newspapers, periodicals, books and magazines I regularly receive, the *Christian Courier* delivers a stimulating and quite unique message. In the avalanche of denominational and other Christian magazines CC stands out as the independent and only voice of the Christian social democrat in Canada and presents articles appealing to Christian readers with a broad range of interests.

I must admit that I do not always read all or even much of the paper, nor do I always agree with everything I do read, but I have continued to renew my subscription year after year because, for me, there is no other regularly appearing independent forum for Christian writers and readers, particularly those with roots in the Calvinistic life view and culture, and with interests beyond their local congregation.

Your editorial ("Personal reflections on the ascent of Barack Obama") in the November 24, 2008, issue alone is worth the price of my subscription. Your regular writers, contributors, editors, printers, distributors, managers and owners perform important ministry work, and have my prayerful support and admiration.

Jan van der Woerd
Burlington, Ontario

A challenge for the church

Thank you for your challenge "Whither CC?" (CC November 24) Many years ago, when I was the first Christian Labour Association rep for Alberta, I felt very closely connected to *Calvinist Contact*. In those days I felt that we as Calvinists had a message and ministry to present to this nation.

I would like to see *Christian Courier* become more and more the people's medium to challenge the church to remain on its narrow path.

We live in a time of spiritual decay, and to have a laymen's publication that will challenge us and the church alike to be a light in these darkening days could make me really proud and willing to become an active participant in such a publication.

Richard Oostra
Surrey, BC

"A Jewish divorce"

Jacob, who lives in Tel Aviv, phones his son Samuel, who lives in New York. "I'm sorry to spoil your day, son, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are getting divorced. Forty-five years of misery is quite enough."

But Dad," the son hollers, all upset, "how can you say that, and then a few days before Christmas!"

"Forget about that family get-together, son. We can't stand looking at each other's face anymore. I've had enough. You could do me favour and inform your sister in Chicago." He throws down the receiver.

Stunned by this news the son phones his sister, Anna. She loses it completely. "How can they do that at that age? I'm going to take care of this immediately." Anna phones her dad that very minute. "You are not going to divorce, hear. Don't do anything until my brother and I arrive in Tel Aviv. Did you hear me? Don't do anything and wait for us!"

Father Jacob puts down the phone, turns to his wife and says, "Very good, Rebecca. Everything is going as we expected. The two are coming home for Christmas and they are paying for their own flight."

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two yrs. (48 issues)	$85.00	$85.00 US	

Advertising deadlines: display and classified advertising: Wednesday, 9 a.m. (12 days before publication date) See classified pages or web site **www.christiancourier** for more details.
(ISSN 1192-3415) Published second and fourth Mondays of the month.

Address all correspondence to: 5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1
Tel: 905-682-8311 or 1-800-969-4838
e-mail: Advertising: ads@christiancourier.ca
Subscriptions: subscriptions@christiancourier.ca

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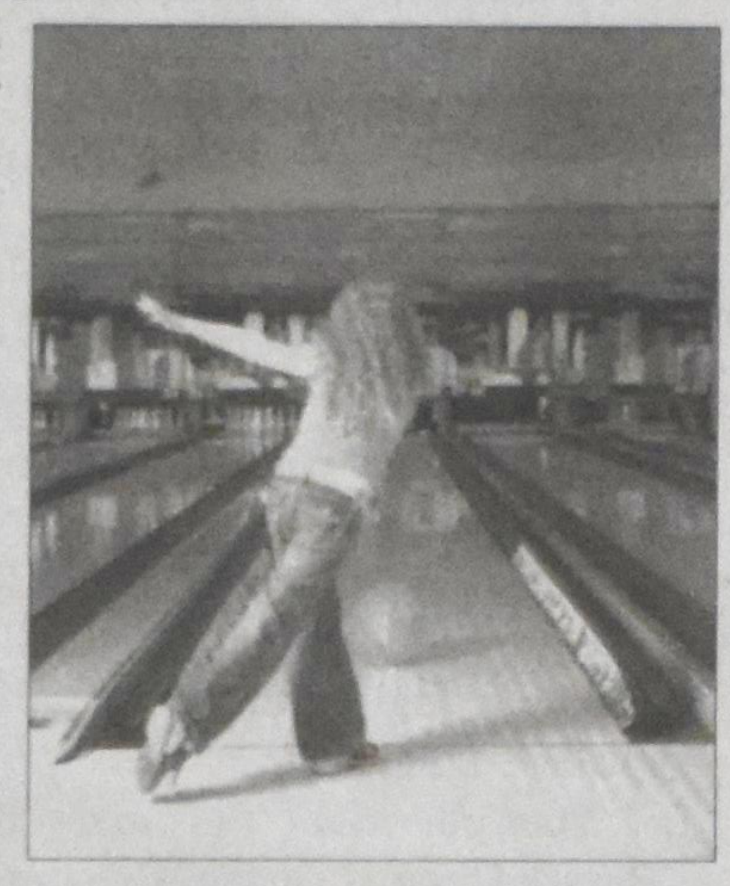
Family

A family-style New Year's celebration

Lisa M. Petsche

Before the clock strikes midnight on New Year's Eve, my family will celebrate with some strikes of our own.

At a local bowling alley, that is.



This tradition started several years ago, after my daughter attended a birthday party there in early December. She brought home a flyer headlined, "Be with your family to end the year," advertising a special New Year's Eve event. For two hours in the early evening, a family could rent a five- or ten-pin lane for a reasonable, flat fee.

My husband and I liked the idea of doing something active for a change, rather than the five of us sitting at home watching movies. So we made a reservation. The event turned out to be even more fun than we anticipated, and we became hooked.

In addition to the opportunity to bowl a couple of games, there are raffles and games for the children. Our kids' favourite part, though, is a stretch of cosmic bowling, involving black light, disco balls, a light show and upbeat music. It really makes for a party atmosphere.

Halfway through the event, festive hats and noisemakers are circulated. The kids make enthusiastic use of the latter until it's time for the concluding (early) countdown to the New Year. Everyone receives a cup of ginger ale for the accompanying toast.

My children have raved so much about the experience that last year my sister's family decided to attend a similar event at a bowling centre near their home. It was the most fun they'd had on New Year's Eve in a long time, and they plan to make it a tradition now, too.

Predictions

My extended family also has a tradition we refer to as the New Year's time capsule. It involves making personal predictions for the New Year, and reviewing previously made predictions for the year that has just ended. The predictions, listed on a sheet of lined paper, are encapsulated in a cardboard roll with decorative wrap. This is perched in the Christmas tree, and gets packed away with the ornaments, to be brought out in a year's time. – That time is New Year's Day, after dinner. – The evening involves lively conversation, a holiday sing-along, a host of board games played by various age groups and a year-in-review trivia quiz.

Amid the festivities, we bring out the time capsule and review last year's family-related predictions (which might include, for example, an addition to the family or a new skill acquired by someone), scoring them to see how many were accurate. Each year we compare our score with previous ones, to see how our psychic skills are holding up. Then we develop a sizable list of predictions for the year ahead, coming up with at least one for each family member. Some of them are serious and straightforward, while others are written with a measure of humour. They can even be somewhat unlikely, as long as they're not out of the realm of possibility.

There is often spirited debate about what to include and how to word it. We refrain from predictions that place undue pressure on someone, and those that are a virtual certainty.

A couple of perennial favourites include "Mom will finally win the Reader's Digest Sweepstakes" and "Denise (my sister who's a nurse) won't work on Christmas Day." The rest are different each year.

We have a great deal of fun working on our annual time capsule. It gives us an opportunity to reflect on our goals, hopes and dreams, and to speculate about the future. – We greet the New Year with a feeling of anticipation and, above all else, of unity.

Lisa M. Petsche is a clinical social worker and a freelance writer specializing in family life and inter-generational issues. Her email: lpetsche@idirect.ca

Great expectations

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke

When our son and daughter-in-law moved onto their farm, there was much work to be done. Willene tackled the farmhouse with zeal and boundless energy. She stripped layers of wallpaper, sanded woodwork and pulled up old carpet and vinyl. In between twelve-hour shifts as a registered nurse she painted practically everything that didn't move and shopped for bargains on new flooring. With the help of her dad they gutted a couple of tiny rooms, knocked out the wall between them and created a spacious new master bedroom.

Finally most of the house looked cheerful and up-to-date, with the exception of one small bedroom. That, James told us, would someday be the baby's room. "Yep," he said, "When you see Willene heading for that room with the sledgehammer, you can start knitting booties, Mom."

Last spring Willene began tearing out a wall full of built-in drawers and cupboards and yanking down drywall. Not wanting to be a meddlesome mother-in-law, I asked no questions. But I wondered if she might be up to something beyond home improvements.

New status

On Mother's Day my children came for lunch. I opened the card from James and Willene and read aloud, "Have a happy Grandmother's Day." For a minute I thought they had given me the wrong card. The light of understanding dawned as I saw the smile on Willene's face.

"You mean I'm going to be a grandma?" I said. James and Willene nodded vigorously. The whole family burst into a frenzy of hugs and happy tears as we congratulated one another on our soon-to-be upgraded status. Stephanie and Jessica would be first-time aunts, Jack and I would be promoted to grandparenthood, and James and Willene would become Daddy and Mommy. Such excitement!

Although the news wasn't totally unexpected, the timing made for a delightful surprise. I couldn't wait to tell everyone. My friends who were already grandmothers assured me that a wonderful adventure lay ahead. One friend cautioned me that waiting for a grandchild is, in a way, harder than waiting for your own child. After all, when you're the one expecting a baby, you experience the progress every day, whereas a prospective grandmother has to ask what's going on or wait to be told.

Great-grandmothers gift

Through the summer Willene didn't gain much weight. I didn't want to pry, so I asked subtle questions like, "You are really pregnant, right?" She handed me an ultrasound picture decorated with duckies, to put on my fridge.

One morning we stood together in the freshly painted nursery. I admired the new curtains and the crib. I spotted a pair of blue booties neatly packaged in a plastic bag and thought, *Aha! It's a boy.* Closer inspection revealed a pair of pink booties as well, and a hand-made white blanket – gifts of love made by Willene's grandmother many years ago. Knowing she wouldn't be alive to see her youngest granddaughter's children, she nonetheless wanted to pass along a token of her affection. I considered the beauty of that gesture as I drove home. Family must have been of the utmost importance to Mrs. Klapwyk. Now I wondered, would we be using the pink booties or the blue ones?

My own dear mother-in-law (a.k.a. *Grandma VanderSlikke*) didn't know what to hope for. With two great-grandsons so far, the thought of a baby girl appealed to her. Still, wouldn't it be special if the VanderSlikke name continued into the next generation with a little boy? Really it was a win-win situation. Somewhere along the line, for no scientific reason whatsoever, Jack and I had a feeling this would be a boy. Stephanie and Jess agreed. Only time would tell.

The phone call

At long last, early on December 1, James took Willene to the hospital. I waited as patiently as I could, delaying my shower and not going out to feed the cats in the shed for fear of missing his phone call. I couldn't focus on Bible reading and flitted mindlessly from one task to another. I swept the kitchen floor, made the bed, cleaned the bathroom sink, swept the kitchen floor and then realized I had already done that.

I tried not to stare at the clock. Around 10:00 a telemarketer called. At least I knew the phone was working. Shortly after 11:00 James called. "Hello, Mom. How are you?" he teased.

"I'm fine, James." I said with exaggerated calmness. "So, what's new?"

"Oh, not too much…except I'm the proud daddy of a brand new baby boy. His name is Daniel Adrian."

A boy! I wrote his name and other details on the white board, afraid I would forget something in my excitement.

"You can come see him anytime," said James. "He's looking forward to meeting you."

"Okay," I said. "I have to go cry now, and then I need a shower, and then Nana will be there." Tears trickled down my cheeks as I pulled on my coat and boots. I had to go find Poppa Jack and tell him the good news.

That afternoon I held my grandson for the first time. I stroked his silken cheek, admired his thick, dark hair, and marveled as he wrapped his tiny fingers around mine. I savored the unmistakable fragrance of a brand new life and thanked the Lord for this tiny, perfect work of art he had blessed us with.

In the evening Jack and I reminisced about our early days of parenting. Before bedtime I flipped through the pictures of Daniel on my digital camera and was surprised at how I longed to hold him again.

My friends were right. This grandmother thing is amazing.

Heidi VanderSlikke lives in Harriston, Ont. Her email: vanderslikke@everus.ca

Coming home

i
My hands can create
My heart can hold the stories
Of those who remember home
with joy
with pain,
those who like me, seek home,
Have lost home, who think they will
never find home again

Home has been
my holy grail
My longing
fuel for the quest

Community-making
Home-making
My call, my longing, my quest
Has spanned years and continents

ii
Home can be elusive
A place?
In my head? In my heart?
Home is hard to define
but I do know
the shape of the longing

There have been days
When I could taste, touch and feel
What it means to be home
But it has been like a fluid
When I try to
contain it
hold it
in my hands
It slips through my fingers
And they are left with
The memory of its touch
My heart left with the memory
of its feel
Soul left with a lingering taste
Home make

iii
Home create
Tell stories
Live stories
Always hoping that
One of those stories
Will lead you home

iv
Early mornings, words in worship, wine, words in community,
laughter, rejoicing, struggle and tears
conversations long into the night over splashing water and clinking cutlery
shared love, shared faith, food for body, food for soul
wrestling, possibility, identity, sexuality, forgiveness, rest
story, scripture, embracing, prayer

I feel full

v
Stop and be
Surrender to Me
To community
Learn to receive
With open hands
And the giving is richer
Fuller, deeper

I will be your home

vi
Life giver
Community maker
Sustainer and creator
You are here
in our worship
our laughter
in our struggle
our words
in our silence

You are here

You fill us up
body, spirit, soul

I've learned to
Open my hands
my heart
To you God incarnate
To community

And the quest ends

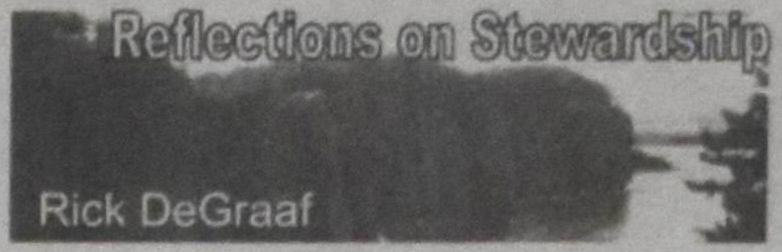
I am here

The journey continues
But now
I know

I am home

~Bethany J. Osborne
November 8, 2008
CRC Campus Ministry
40th Anniversary Celebration
2008

God's gift



"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.... For unto us a child a is born, to us a son is given," Isaiah 9:2, 6a

A bright light in a dark world – what a gift! At Christmas time when the nights are longer we love to decorate with lights. To me it seems to be so appropriate (if not sometimes extravagant) to do so. Jesus, the light of the world, has come and is coming again in dazzling light as the Scriptures so clearly tell us. Jesus came as the child prophesied by the prophet Isaiah so many years before he came. Jesus is the child the prophet is referring to – the Son of God given as God's gift to mankind – a gift of restoration to God's presence. Receiving this brings eternal significance and consequence – a gift of life now and forever.

God gave his one and only son. No one can out-give God! Through the gift of Jesus, God expresses his great love for us: *"No one has greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."* (John 15:13) It is this great giving God whom we serve and whom we love. So let's turn on the lights to reflect our happiness as we celebrate this Christmas.

God's gift keeps on giving. It is the hope our faith is founded upon. Without the gift of Jesus our life would be in darkness. We would be lost in a black abyss never to return. It is this "bright" gift that we can give to others, even when others may not be willing to accept it. As believers we offer real and eternal hope – the offer of full forgiveness for sin. And just as light shines and spreads over darkness conquering it, so we too become a beacon of hope to a humanity that is fogged-in in darkness. We bear light in a dark world – that is our gift to those around us. Even in the smallest ways, we give this world some light – many times unknowingly. We grow in our light witness by growing in our faithfulness to the Holy Spirit's leading.

Just as light can be focused, intensified, reflected and refracted, so we can be a blessing to others as "light-bearers" of Jesus' gift of love. We can be focused and intense in the life of an individual, we can model or reflect Jesus' love to many in how we use our time and talents, and we can shape or refract the love of Jesus in loving discipline and care for those whose lives we influence (children, grandchildren, colleagues, siblings). We can encourage those we touch with our words and actions of love – expressing God's care and love for all those around us.

God has given Jesus – this child that was foretold so long ago. Jesus came as a child, served and completed his mission to save us. As a result we have life now and always. We are enabled to be givers of that same hope – the same light of life that Jesus gave. May God bless you as stewards of this light!

Stewardly tip: Person to Person – Giving gifts is a wonderful practice as it reflects how God has given. Matt. 25:45 records: "*...I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."* This Christmas consider a special gift for someone who really needs it. It's easy to give to a family member or friends. But what about the "least": those who have no friends?

Readers: Share your "Stewardly tips" so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: New Beginnings

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario Rick's email: rickd@csservices.ca

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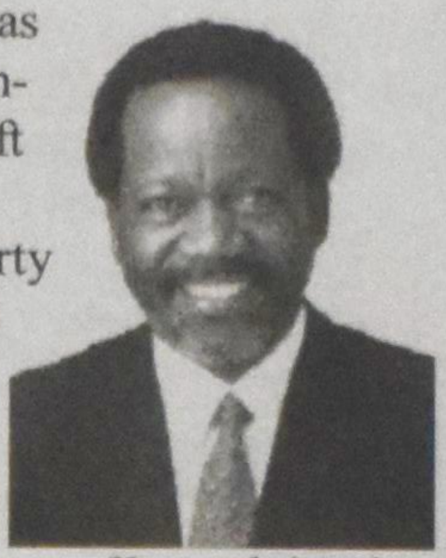
South African leaders row over likening of ANC leader to Jesus

PRETORIA, S. Africa (Ekklesia, ENI) – A provincial leader of the African National Congress (ANC) recently compared the president of that party, South Africa's ruling party, to Jesus. The leader of the opposition party, the African Christian Democrats, immediately responded with condemnation.

Rev. Kenneth Meshoe said in a Dec. 3 statement, "The ACDP condemns and totally rejects the ANC's disdain for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their habit of joking about, and using the name of the Lord in vain, is tantamount to blasphemy and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms." Meshoe added, "The writing is on the wall for the ANC that has no respect for God."

The ANC leader in the Orange Free State Province, Ace Magashule, told *Die Volksblad* newspaper in an interview published on Dec. 1 that the ANC president, Jacob Zuma, is suffering just like Jesus did.

"Jesus was persecuted. He was called names and betrayed. It's the same kind of suffering Mr. Zuma has had to bear recently, but he's still standing strong. He's not giving up," Magashule told the newspaper. Magashule was reiterating a statement he had made on Nov. 28 when he addressed Zuma supporters while their leader was in the Supreme Court of Appeal in connection with legal proceedings on graft charges.



Kenneth Meshoe

Africa Christian Democratic Party leader Meshoe responded, "The ANC's Free State chairperson compares with a holy and righteous Jesus Christ, with the unrighteous and unholy Jacob Zuma, who faces serious allegations of corruption. The ACDP deplores and totally rejects this."

'Nonsensical claims'

Meshoe also denounced a statement by Zuma in May in which the ANC leader said that God expected the African National Congress to continue to govern South Africa. "Their nonsensical claims that the ANC will rule until Jesus comes is nothing but extreme arrogance that will cause them to lose the privilege of governing South Africa," said Meshoe.

In Magashule's interview with *Die Volksblad*, he explained why he said he did not believe anyone would be uncomfortable with him drawing parallels between Jesus and Zuma. "Why would it make people uncomfortable? I'm a Christian too. There's absolutely nothing wrong with comparisons of this nature. I never said Zuma was Jesus. He can't be Jesus. I merely compared the kind of persecution that had to be endured." Magashule continued, "People are slandering Zuma. What do they want from him? He has long ago apologized and asked for forgiveness for what he has done wrong."

The African Christian Democrats have four of the 400 seats in the South African parliament compared to 297 for the African National Congress and 47 for the main opposition Democratic Alliance.

An apology that Zuma did make nationally was for having unprotected sex with a woman who said she was HIV-positive. This information emerged in 2006 during a rape trial against Zuma at the end of which he was acquitted.

The Supreme Court of Appeal has reserved judgement until Jan. 12 to decide on an appeal by the National Prosecuting Authority against a lower court ruling that had effectively halted the prosecution of Zuma on corruption charges.

Celebrating Christmas with Martin Luther

In the theological tumult that was Martin Luther's life, the great reformer seemed to be heartened each year by the great festivals of the church, particularly Advent and Christmas. The man who "invented" the Protestant parsonage was also sustained by a blazing sense of humor and a happy home life.

It was open house all year in the large converted monastery at the east end of Wittenberg where Luther, his wife Katie, and their six children lived, along with numerous students who stayed there as well.

Luther and his wife Katrina

One of them wrote that as Christmas approached, Luther grew increasingly cheerful: "All his words and songs and thoughts concerned the incarnation of our Lord. Then he sighed and said, 'Oh, we poor people that we should be so cold and indifferent to this great joy that has been given us. For this is indeed the greatest gift, which far exceeds all else that God has created. Yet we believe so sluggishly, even though the angels proclaim and preach and sing, and their lovely song sums up the whole Christian faith, for "Glory to God in the highest" is the very heart of worship.'"

Legend has it that the Christmas tree was Luther's idea

Introduction by Paul L. Maier to a Christianity Today *compilation of Luther's references to Advent and Christmas.*

Irish broadcast commission bans Christian bookstore's radio Christmas ad

DUBLIN (IT) – "Ridiculous" and "plain silly" is how Catholic theologian Enda McDonagh described the banning of a radio ad for a Christian bookstore in Ireland. The bookstore, Veritas, is owned by the Catholic Bishops in Ireland. Besides books and music, Veritas sells a range of unusual and thoughtful gifts, for both adults and children.

The ban was imposed by the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI).

The BCI ruled that by suggesting a Christmas gift that "means more," the ad was promoting religious faith. If that's true, many people far prefer that to moral emptiness. Senator Ronan Mullen said the BCI ruling points to a "values vacuum" that will logically lead to the banning of all Christmas advertisements.

"People of faith now feel that they are being treated like some mad person in the attic, who if given access to advertising would start assailing all and sundry and start launching crusades and jihads all over the place," Ronan said.

Father Enda McDonagh, retired professor of moral theology at St Patrick's College, Maynooth, said, "It sounds a bit crazy. There's a little touch of anything to do with religion being no longer acceptable. This so-called pluralist Ireland might be pluralist for everybody except somebody who's speaking reason about Christmas." He added, "it's not only disappointing, it's plain silly."

Senator Ronan Mullen: a values vacuum

McDonagh spoke at the launch in Dublin of his book *Remembering to Forgive: A Tribute to Una O'Higgins O'Malley* , published by Veritas.

There was a generally angry reaction to the BCI decision which followed three unsuccessful attempts by an advertising agency acting for Veritas to meet BCI wording requirements. The final draft read, "Cake and crackers, Santa and stockings, turkey and tinsel, Mistletoe and mince pies, and presents and puddings. Christmas: Aren't we forgetting something? This Christmas, why not give a gift that means more?"

The BCI deemed offensive the lines "Christmas: aren't we forgetting something?"; "Why not give a gift that means more?"; and "So to give a gift that means more." It also found that asking people to visit the website <www.veritas.ie> was "unacceptable."

On its own website, the BCI said its view is "that the scripts as proposed may not comply with legislation and regulation regarding advertising directed towards a religious end." This is not the first time BCI has come down on Veritas. Before Christmas last year, at BCI's instigation, Veritas had to remove the word "crib" from an advertisement before it could be broadcast.

Veritas has seven shops in the Republic of Ireland and one in Derry, Northern Ireland. In a statement Veritas said it was "bitterly disappointed." The chain's director, Maura Hyland, noted the "myriad of adverts being broadcast for alcohol, for example – which are not creating difficulties for the BCI."

"Merry Christmas" preferred to "Happy Holidays" by large majority

Marian Van Til

NEW YORK – Virtually everywhere in both Canada and the U.S. shoppers in December are greeted or bid good bye by store clerks and cashiers using the phrase "Happy Holidays." Mentioning Christmas at all is now considered offensive to those who do not practice Christianity, even though Christmas is still the name of the universal holiday, even though adherents of Islam, Judaism, native or other religions make up a small minority of the population in both countries, and even though polls have showed that few of them are actually offended by "Merry Christmas."

There is increasing evidence that the religious adherents most offended – by the phrase that's not supposed to be offensive – are the majority Christians who bristle at the refusal of businesses, schools, social and government agencies to wish them a "Merry Christmas" or even to refer to December 25 as Christmas.

The traditional media seem to be ignoring the issue for the most part. On the Internet, however, the issue is alive and well. At the beginning of December the hugely popular American news and multi-purpose website msn.com began a poll of users opinions on the issue. Poll takers were asked whether the greeting "Merry Christmas" should be used, whether "Happy Holidays" should prevail, or whether both should be used.

By the morning of the 8th of December, 187,741 people had already responded. The results were overwhelming: 76 per cent said, "Say 'Merry Christmas'"; only 7.5 per cent wanted to use "Happy Holidays" exclusively; and 16 per cent said they feel okay with both; 0.4 per cent wanted some other greeting.

Making Christians feel intolerant

Two years ago the Catholic League began, and has since continued, a campaign to get Christians to react against the now nearly universal use of "Happy Holidays." They call their effort "Operation: Just Say 'Merry Christmas.'" Those words are printed on a wristband the league sells for $2 (US). The wristband, and an ornament with the same text, is available from their website <www.justsaymerrychristmas.com>, as is a refrigerator magnet saying, "Keep Christ in Christmas." Says the league, "It is our hope that by wearing the wristband you will join us to remind others to celebrate the true meaning of this holy season."

"The enemies of Christmas have succeeded in making Christians feel as if we are bad and intolerant to wish someone a Merry Christmas," the league says. "This is political correctness run amok. We have reached an all time low point ... when human sensibilities are elevated above offending our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is long past the time for Christians to stand firm in our faith." The campaign is designed to "encourage Christians" in North American and around the world to "proudly proclaim the Christ Child as the center of the Christmas season once again."

The American Family Association is another organization fostering a similar campaign. It provides wearable buttons saying, "It's OK to say Merry Christmas." It also offers a five-foot high lighted cross intended as an outdoor Christmas decoration. However, many website visitors have pointed out that the cross with its electric lights may elicit thoughts of the Ku Klux Klan's burning crosses.

Bill O'Reilly, the hugely popular and sometimes controversial talk-show host on the Fox News cable network is continuing his "Merry Christmas" campaign started nearly five years ago. His website offers a red and white bumper sticker that reads "We say 'Merry Christmas.'" O'Reilly, himself a Catholic, doesn't emphasize the issue in an overtly Christian way, however. His argument is that Christians are the majority in North America, the holiday is Christmas, and no one should be denigrated for saying "Merry Christmas," nor offended for being greeted that way.

Canadians also involved

Many Canadian Christians are also disturbed by the "Happy Holidays" trend, and efforts to avoid it – or combat it – have existed for some time, but have not been as nationally organized nor as prominent as such campaigns are in the U.S.

They have been effective enough, however, that "Koby," a regular writer on Blogs Canada asserted as early as 2004, "Suddenly saying 'Merry Christmas' has become a political act. It is part of concerted effort by social conservatives to take back the holidays from those 'liberals' wishing to wash away any religious connotations associated with such traditions. The whole debate drives me around the bend." Koby doesn't mind the commercialization of Christmas and wrote, "I am in no mood to have the Christians with the help of their Liberal opponents instill religious significance into those traditions."

Those views were not universal with the blog's readers. One dissenter pointed out, "Actually, it is all the maneuvering to avoid saying or presenting the word 'Christmas' that is the political act."

Another Campaign for Christmas is supported by churches in both Canada and the U.S., but is headquartered in Williamsburg, Virginia. They offer buttons that say: "It's OK, Wish me a Merry Christmas." The group is aimed at the often silent majority of Christians, as many of these campaigns are. Their website explains, "To wear a button that says, 'It's OK, Wish Me a Merry Christmas' is to identify yourself as someone who has heard and received the good news. It tells people you are not just shopping for a winter festival, but what you are buying is celebrating your Lord's birth. It says that you are in need of the Savior whose birth the angels announced so long ago. It gives the other person the opportunity to proclaim to you the 'good news of great joy that will be for all people,' and say 'Merry Christmas.'"

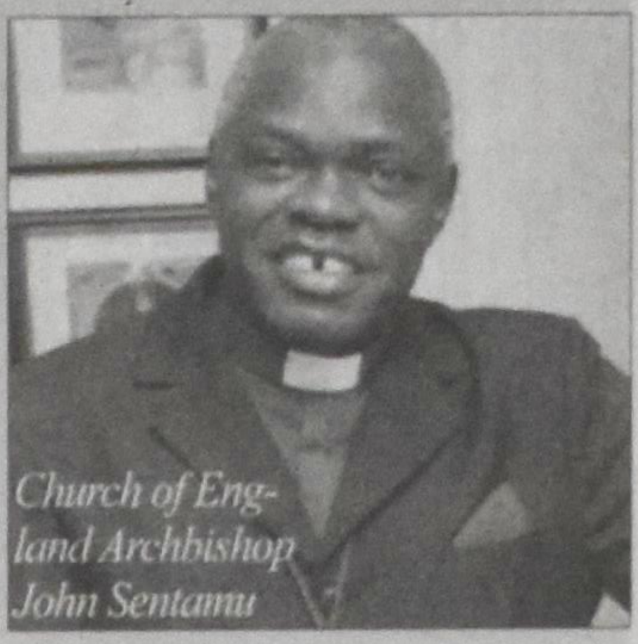
The group has a one-million button goal, i.e., they're hoping to distribute their buttons to one million Americans and Canadians who promise to wear them. They also ask that letters be written to retailers asking them to allow employees to say "Merry Christmas."

Participating Canadian churches are all in Ontario but are denominationally diverse. There are Presbyterians, Roman and Ukranian Catholics, Anglicans, a community church and one Christian Reformed – Living Hope in Sarnia.

Archbishop of York calls for the overthrow of Zimbabwe's Mugabe

YORK, UK (Ekklesia) – The Archbishop of York, Dr. John Sentamu, believes that Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe should be forced out of office as soon as possible, the country's cholera outbreak being the final straw with the tyrannical regime.

Dr. Sentamu is the second highest figure in the Church of England. He told readers of the British paper *The Observer*, that Mugabe and his allies should be overthrown so that they can stand trial in The Hague for crimes against humanity. "The time to remove them from power has come," Sentamu says.


Church of England Archbishop John Sentamu

Sentamu has high-placed company. On December 6 British Prime Minister Gordon Brown also urged the world to tell Mr. Mugabe that "enough is enough" amid growing concern over the country's cholera outbreak.

Zimbabwe has appealed for international help over a cholera outbreak that has claimed at least 565 lives. At least 12, 545 cases have been recorded since August 2008. The United Nations Children's Fund in Zimbabwe is preparing to deal with a possible 60,000 cholera cases in coming weeks. And UNICEF's chief in Harare, Roeland Monasch, explained that such a jump in cholera cases could bring the number of deaths to around 3,000 persons.

Inactivity unconscionable

Sentamu asserted that the world can no longer remain "inactive" in the face of this growing humanitarian crisis. He says that a power-sharing deal between Mugabe and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change is "now dead."

"The time has come for Robert Mugabe to answer for his crimes against humanity, against his countrymen and women and for justice to be done," said Sentamu, adding, "The winds of change that once brought hope to Zimbabwe and its neighbours have become a hurricane of destruction with the outbreak of cholera, destitution, starvation and systemic abuse of power by the state. Robert Mugabe and his henchmen must now take their rightful place in The Hague and answer for their actions."

Sentamu is not afraid of controversy. In December of last year he dramatically cut up his clerical collar live on the BBC's Andrew Marr TV show and vowed not to wear another until Zimbabwe saw a change in regime.

The archbishop has direct experience of oppression at the hands of the late Idi Amin's regime in Uganda. He was a high court judge before moving into the Church of England.

At Christmas, remember the persecuted

(ICC) – Every year, 200 million Christians suffer persecution simply because they have chosen to be named among the children of God. Only a fraction of their stories are reported and fewer reach the ears of the Church.

Many in the West believe that Christian persecution ended a long time ago or is not very widespread. But the fact is that Christian persecution touches every part of the globe everyday. The following countries are those well known for their human rights violations because of persecution or severe discrimination against Christians.

Africa: Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, and Morocco

Asia: Nepal, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, China, Laos, North Korea, Bhutan, Maldives, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan

Europe: Belarus, European Union

Latin American: Cuba

The Middle East: Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Turkey, Jordan, West Bank, and Gaza.

In many of these countries it is dangerous, even deadly, to evangelize and disciple. In one small country where an international mission works, there were seven assassinations of Christian leaders by radical Islamists in 2008. This kind of danger greatly curtails the amount of work that can be done, but courageous Christians are still doing it. And radio, internet and satellite TV broadcasts have become more crucial.

International Christian Concern, Open Doors and other Christian ministries to the persecuted covet your prayer for the suffering brothers and sisters in all of these countries. And for courage for Christians in free countries to bear witness to what they believe.

Review

Sabotaged from the Left

Party of Defeat: How Democrats and Radicals Undermined America's War on Terror Before and After 9-11, by David Horowitz & Ben Johnson. Spence Publishing Co., 2008, 197 pp., $22.95.

Reviewed by Harry Antonides

...[A] nation divided in wartime is a nation that invites its own defeat. Yet that is precisely how Americans are facing the global war that radical Islamists have declared on them. (PoD, p.3)

The whole world is watching this war and the two adversaries: the Islamic nation, on the one hand, and the United States and its allies on the other. It is either victory and Glory or misery and humiliation. (Osama bin Laden, December 28, 2004)

This relatively short book tells in clear language, citing chapter and verse, how the American political Left, in league with the mainstream (liberal) media, attempted to destroy President Bush's effectiveness as commander-in-chief. It's not a pretty story, but one that needs to be understood in order to grasp what ails that country.

David Horowitz started out as a Marxist rebel until he saw through the evil at the heart of that ideology, and then he became a tireless advocate of a free and open society. He is president of the David Horowitz Freedom Center in Los Angeles, which publishes *Front Page Magazine*. Ben Johnson is managing editor of this magazine. (www.FrontPageMagazine.com)

Historical perspective

This book provides a helpful historical overview of the events that preceded the American-led response to the war declared by radical Islamists against the free West. It recalls that the Clinton administration in 1998 requested Congress to pass the *Iraq Liberation Act*, which called for regime change by force. It was ratified by both parties.

Four years later, when president Bush made the same request, a majority of Democrats in the Senate voted in favour. When Bush gave the order to invade Iraq on March 19, 2003, a large majority of the Democratic leadership, including former President Clinton and his secretaries of state and defense, supported that move.

Immediately after the 9-11 attack, even leading Democrats who later became the most outspoken critics of President Bush's policies, professed their determination to stand with the president, including Al Gore, Senator Robert Byrd, and the freshman New York Senator Hillary Clinton. She publicly urged the president "Not only to seek out and exact punishment on the perpetrators, but to make very clear that not only those who harbor terrorists, but those who in any way aid or comfort them whatsoever will face the wrath of our country." The president's approval rating then stood at 85 per cent.

Al Gore, addressing the Council of Foreign Relations on February 12, 2002, supported President Bush's designation of an "Axis of Evil." He said that Saddam Hussein's Iraq posed "a virulent threat in a class by itself " and regime change by force in Iraq should be an option. He said: "As far as I am concerned, a final reckoning with that government should be on the table.... We must be prepared to go the limit."

However, that initial unity soon began to crumble and then quickly became a yawning chasm. At first, it was the most extreme Left of the party that objected to the president's decision to go to war. But then the crescendo of criticism built up, abetted by Michael Moore's film *Fahrenheit 9-11*, a reckless vendetta against President Bush. The tone of the debate descended into conspiratorial bitterness and contempt, now adopted by the mainline leadership of the Democratic Party.

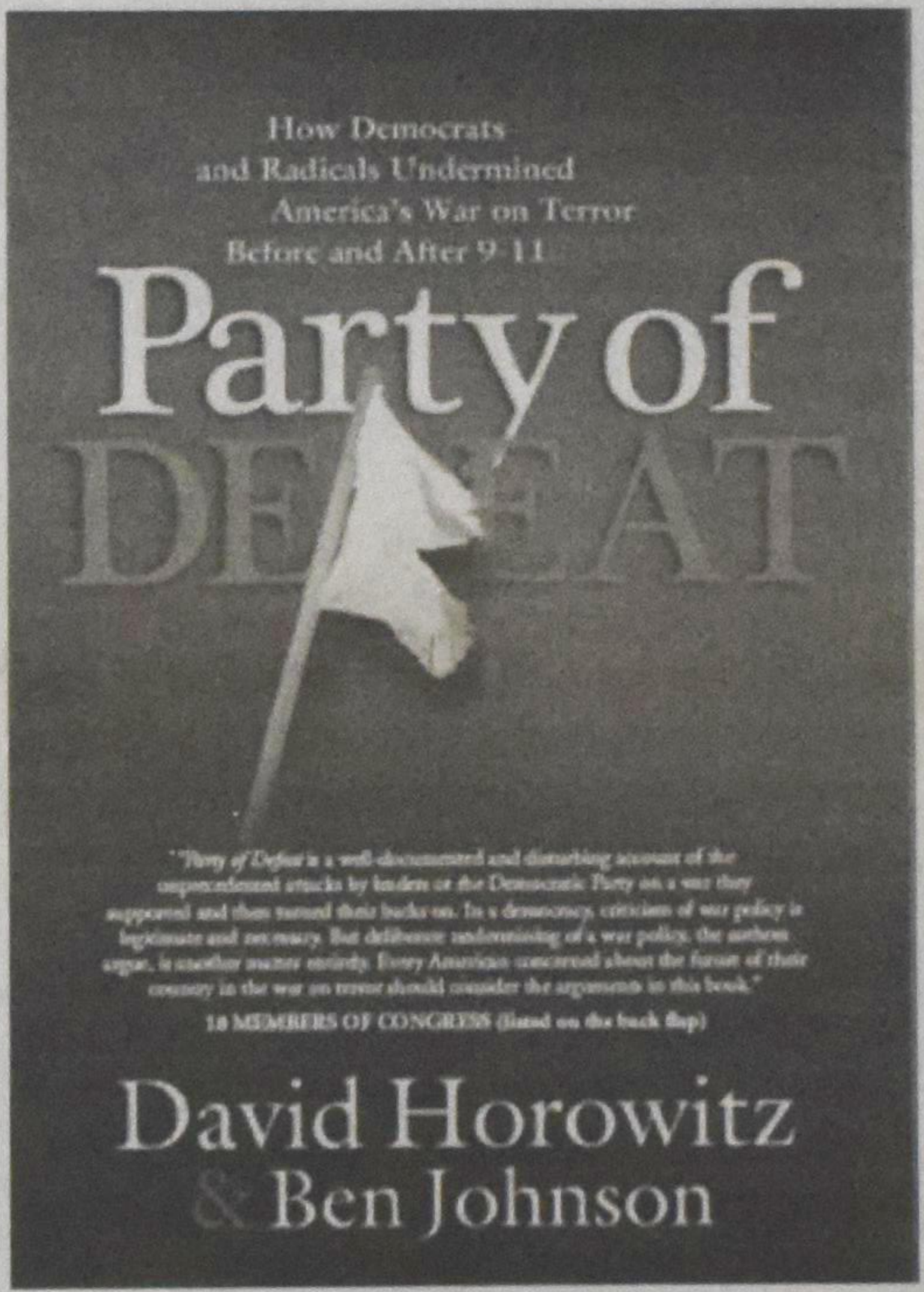
This went so far as to publicly accuse Bush of having known in advance that America would be attacked but saying nothing. This outlandish accusation was first launched by congresswoman Cynthia McKinney but then picked up by others, including Hillary Clinton and Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle.

Home front collapse

The first attempt to destroy the World Trade Center in 1993 had been prosecuted as an ordinary crime, ignoring the true character of the religious fanaticism behind that attack. (See Andrew C. McCarthy's *Willful Blindness*.) The record is clear that the Clinton administration missed a score of opportunities to act against those who had declared war on the U.S., including turning down offers of Osama bin Laden's extradition.

What made matters worse was the dismantling of U.S defence and intelligence capabilities that had begun earlier and continued apace during Clinton's watch. The loss (and non-replacement) of key personnel, including those skilled in foreign languages was creating dangerous gaps.

One of the most destructive restraints on the FBI and the CIA was the "wall" designed to keep the agencies from sharing information – a kind of suicide pact if there ever was one. It is now well known that these policies were responsible for missing the valuable clues that would likely have caught the 9-11 terrorists.



Another factor not mentioned by the anti-Bush crowd is that precious time in getting the new Bush administration up to speed was lost because of the drawn-out court challenges of the 2000 election outcome. Early in his tenure president Bush had asked for a thorough overview of the state of intelligence services. That report landed on his desk on September 10, 2001.

False accusations

The critics of the Bush policies ignore all of this background. The initial broad support among the Democrats right after 9-11 soon withered. But they had a problem. How to justify their drastic change of mind? It started with finding fault with the prosecution of the Iraq war, which was not difficult to do.

The defeat of Saddam Hussein's regime was surprisingly quick and with relatively few casualities. But the aftermath was filled with stumbles, setbacks and mistakes that provided plenty of ammunition to the critics. They were mightily supported in their opposition by the mainline media, led by the *New York Times*, which were determined to put this war and the president's leadership in the worst possible light.

As the war progressed, the accusations became more and more irresponsible, switching from finding fault with the conduct of the war to accusing Bush of having lied to the American people.

Even leading Democrats, who had previously endorsed president Bush's decision to use military force, now began to make the most outrageous accusations. In February 2004, Al Gore appearing on a MoveOn.org event declared that Bush "had betrayed us."

Aiding the enemy

What was in fact a minor incident perpetrated by a few dim-witted U.S. soldiers at the Abu Ghraib prison was blown up into a major scandal that was eagerly exploited by the antiwar media all over the world. Even leading Democrats added to the furor. On the floor of the Senate, Edward Kennedy compared American troops with Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist thugs. Al Gore referred to the Abu Ghraib prison as "an American Gulag...Bush's Gulag.

Another accusation that got a lot of mileage was that Bush had lied about the presence of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), since none were found. But the report of the Iraq Survey Group, headed by David Kay and published in October 2003, found plenty of evidence that Hussein, in defiance of the UN, had continued an active WMD program.

An extreme example of the vilification of the Bush administration occurred when General David Petraeus, a highly respected and brilliant military commander appeared before Congress to report on the situation in Iraq. On the day he testified, MoveON.org took out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* under the headline " General Petraeus or General Betray Us?"

Senator Hillary Clinton in effect accused the General of lying. She told him: " I think that the reports you provide to us really require a willing suspension of disbelief." Carl Levin, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee called the general's report a "litany of delusion." Other leading Democrats made similar demeaning comments, including Harry Reid, Senate Minority Leader who stated that the General's report has been through the "White House spin machine."

History rewritten

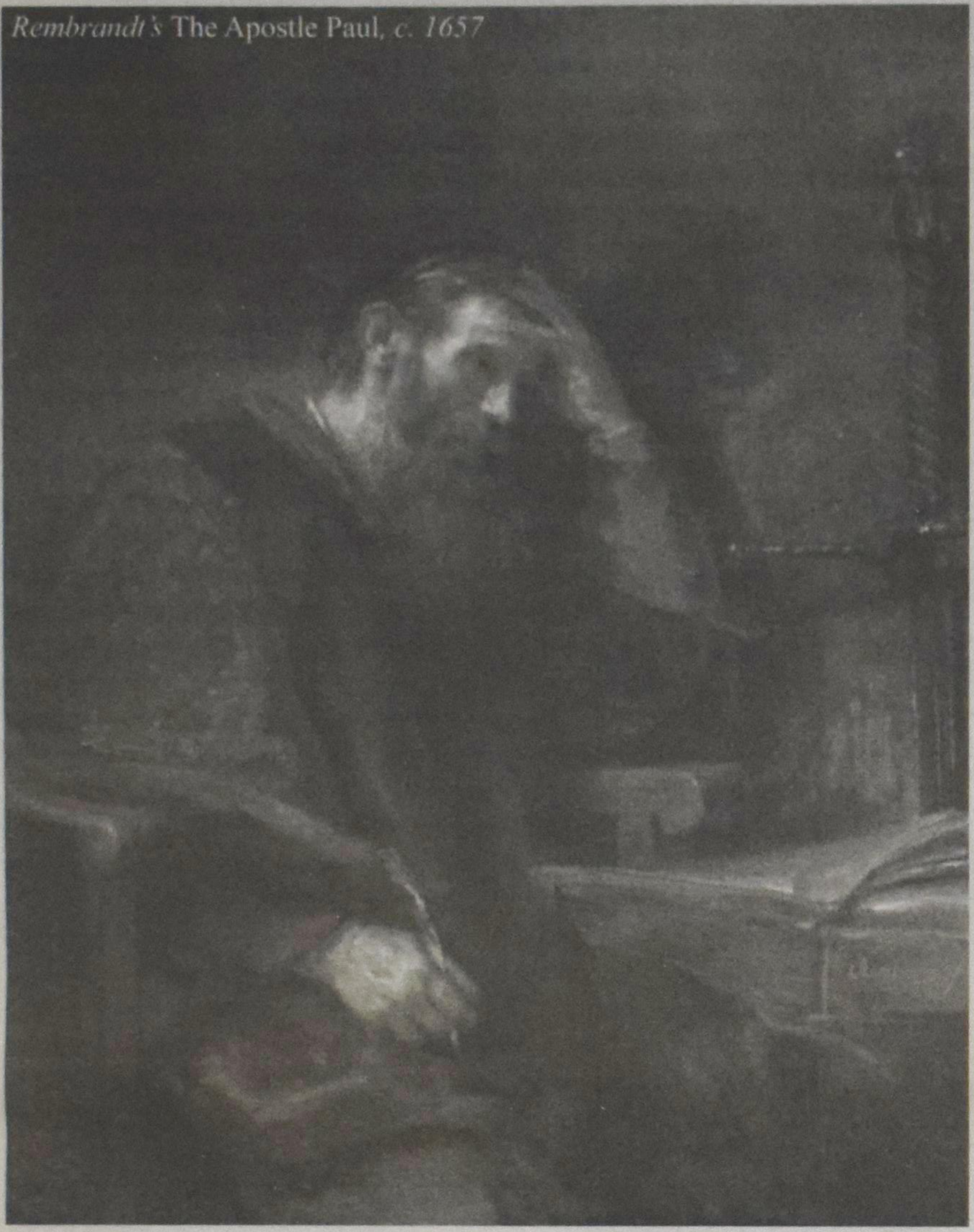
Another serious case of sabotaging the war effort by the media was their publishing classified government documents that betrayed certain national security programs that then had to be discontinued. The forced cancellation of these programs seriously diminished the government's ability to defend the country. There were also criminal offences, but no one was prosecuted.

Party of Defeat tells the story of a country at war with an implacable foe, while it is a country riven by confusion about the nature of that foe and about its own identity. It is not an argument against criticism per se of President Bush or his war policies. But it is a warning against re-writing history, undermining a lawfully elected government, and in so doing hand a major propaganda victory to an enemy that is serious about its threat to destroy the Great and the Little Satan.

This book is must reading for all who look for clarity amidst the confusion surrounding the war. It takes extraordinary courage and determination to publish a book of this kind in defiance of the ruling political correctness ideology of the day.

Harry Antonides (hantonides@sympatico.ca) lives in Willowdale, Ontario.

Fear of death and lust for life


Rembrandt's The Apostle Paul, *c. 1657*

If I fought with wild beasts in Ephesus, for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die."

I Cor. 15:32

One cannot know for certain what Paul means with these words. One can hardly assume that in Ephesus he was literally condemned to fight with wild animals. As a Roman citizen, Paul would not and could not have suffered this dishonourable punishment. It would have involved losing his citizenship. Moreover, this would have been so extraordinary that he would certainly have mentioned it elsewhere, for example, in II Cor. 11, where he lists his experiences.

It is possible, however, that he speaks metaphorically here. "Fighting with wild animals" then means dangerous opposition by people in Ephesus with whom he had, at one time, bitter disagreements. But in that case, we don't know which particular event he is thinking of.

It is a pity that there are so many uncertainties in this case, but getting at the meaning is not insurmountable. What Paul means is quite straightforward. He means that he has given everything he has to his life as an apostle. Every day he has been in danger. Yes, indeed, in a way he has died every day and that in the most gruesome way. He is like a gladiator sent into the arena where he must fight animals that tear him apart.

And now he says: "What good is that to me? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then this must be totally meaningless." He is alluding to a certain philosophy of life that was quite common in the Greco-Roman empire of Paul's days. It is a philosophy that is expressed in the words *let us eat and drink for tomorrow we will die.*

Eating and drinking

That statement, of course, encapsulates *all* zest for life. Indeed, humankind searches for enjoyment by engaging simply in eating and drinking and all other enjoyments one can think of. One can thus live the good life. This can be done in all honour and virtue, but one's "point of gravity" is then totally in one's physical existence: As long as I get good food and drink and other comforts as well, why in the world would I break my head about the rest?

That philosophy is well established also in our day. Most people have work that generates a good income for them. They are quite satisfied with their house, their furniture, their comforts and enjoyments. They are not much concerned with the spiritual content of their lives. The idea that being a person is such a terribly profound matter and that at some point one must collide with God is totally foreign to them. Serving God is totally absent from their lives.

That same philosophy can also be expressed *outside* of all honour and virtue. Then "eating and drinking" become an orgy. In our day there are many people who spend their time doing just that. They don't know what to do with all their money. At least, they are not aware of any other way to spend it than on expensive parties. It stands to reason that they do not know what to do with their *heart.* They want to silence it in the rush and the buzz that life gives.

Most noteworthy in this philosophy is the fact that it is particularly death itself that causes this atmosphere, this ambiance in their lives. Pay special attention to the word *for*: Let us eat and drink *for* tomorrow we die. Life is short and is bounded by a fairly near horizon. It is the horizon of beginning – birth, and end – death. Life is locked up between those two. And it is so vain because it is so limited. Life is a sigh, a dream. Before you know it, it is over, it's done, it's finished. Tomorrow already we die. That's why today we must get out of life as much as we can. A person wants to live, and living means being happy. And happiness means drinking life to the dregs.

> "Lust for … life uses deep sadness as its fertile soil."

Thus death is not only the frontier, but also the foundation of life. Lust for, *zest* for life uses deep sadness as its fertile soil. Actually – and this is felt a bit subconsciously – life is nothing. It is a vainglorious and flighty dream that's gone in the blink of an eye. In the depths of one's heart this is a deeply depressing thought. But in order to camouflage this depression for oneself and for others, one lays over it a thick layer of boundless enjoyment and fun. Eating and drinking is the veil used to cover over death.

Historical fact

Now Paul says: Indeed, if one turn a deaf ear to my gospel, then it will be difficult to conclude anything else regarding the question about the actual value of life. My gospel is the message of the resurrection and with that gospel I was sent into the world. All apostles have discovered that there is a resurrection of the dead. They have discovered that God wants something else with humankind, that he wants to give a person more than just a little bit of fun in the middle of the bitter gall of death.

> "No longer is death a frontier or horizon."

This intent of God's they discovered in the middle of this world's history, in the concrete historic fact: The man Jesus was raised by God from the dead and has appeared to them as the living Lord. In that deed God has extended his beckoning hand over the whole world, over all cemeteries and over all human lives.

No longer is death a frontier or horizon. Death can no longer be life's foundation; nor can it determine life's mood. The Lord God has other plans for us than to allow us to be dumped in the abyss of death. He wants the resurrection, he wants eternal life. That message of the gospel inspires a totally different music in life. Its home tone is no longer sadness and depression, but joy. Our immeasurable and deepest joy can only be in what we know to be God's plan for humankind and for this world.

Total renewal

For that reason chasing after enjoyment in that brief earthly existence becomes childish and superficial. It is based on the mistaken notion that death is the end of life. Even more so: this restless pursuing of enjoyment *itself* is a mistake. This is actually self-evident because who in this world finds real and lasting happiness in the pursuit of enjoyment? Life's enjoyment is as flighty and fragile as life itself.

The gospel of the resurrection brings to life's mood totally different elements. They are the elements of joy and expectation, of persistence and effort, of labour and struggle, of danger and death. Life obtains real and profound meaning.

It must be noted here that the apostle seems to recognize only two possibilities: either enjoy life in the shadow of death, or live in the certainty of the resurrection. We would want to ask the question about a third possibility. After all, since the soul is eternal, is there no continuing existence after death?

Paul would be the last one to deny this, but what he is saying is that he cannot be satisfied with that. The soul's "deathlessness" amounts to the *inside* of life. That knowledge gives me no comfort, leaves me depressed as regards the *outside* of life, physical life. Only the gospel of the resurrection speaks to *all* of life. At no point whatsoever does it leave room for depression. In all aspects of life it awakens joy and expectation. Our heart's real *lust* is not for eating and drinking, it's not for the continuing existence of the soul, but for eternal life in the resurrected Christ.

Translated from the Dutch by Bram Hoff (ehoff@sympatico.ca) of St. Catharines, Ontario.

Islam

A German's view on Islam

Emanuel Tanay

A man, whose family was German aristocracy prior to World War II, owned a number of large industries and estates. When asked how many German people were true Nazis, the answer he gave can guide our attitude toward fanaticism. "Very few people were true Nazis," he said, "but many enjoyed the return of German pride, and many more were too busy to care. I was one of those who just thought the Nazis were a bunch of fools. So the majority just sat back and let it all happen. Then, before we knew it, they owned us, and we had lost control, and the end of the world had come. My family lost everything. I ended up in a concentration camp and the Allies destroyed my factories."

Fanaticism counts

We are told again and again by "experts" and "talking heads" that Islam is the religion of peace and that the vast majority of Muslims just want to live in peace. Although this unqualified assertion may be true, it is entirely irrelevant. It is meaningless fluff, meant to make us feel better, and meant to somehow diminish the spectra of fanatics rampaging across the globe in the name of Islam.

The fact is that the fanatics rule Islam at this moment in history. It is the fanatics who march. It is the fanatics who wage any one of 50 shooting wars worldwide. It is the fanatics who systematically slaughter Christian or tribal groups throughout Africa and are gradually taking over the entire continent in an Islamic wave. It is the fanatics who bomb, behead, murder, or honor-kill. It is the fanatics who take over mosque after mosque. It is the fanatics who zealously spread the stoning and hanging of rape victims and homosexuals. It is the fanatics who teach their young to kill and to become suicide bombers.

Irrelevant majority

The hard, quantifiable fact is that the peaceful majority, the "silent majority," is cowed and extraneous.

Communist Russia was comprised of Russians who just wanted to live in peace, yet the Russian Communists were responsible for the murder of about 20 million people. The peaceful majority were irrelevant. China's huge population was peaceful as well, but Chinese Communists managed to kill a staggering 70 million people.

The average Japanese individual prior to World War II was not a warmongering sadist. Yet, Japan murdered and slaughtered its way across South East Asia in an orgy of killing that included the systematic murder of 12 million Chinese civilians; most killed by sword, shovel, and bayonet.

And who can forget Rwanda, which collapsed into butchery. Could it not be said that the majority of Rwandans were "peace loving"?

History lessons are often incredibly simple and blunt, yet for all our powers of reason, we often miss the most basic and uncomplicated of points: Peace-loving Muslims have been made irrelevant by their silence. Peace-loving Muslims will become our enemy if they don't speak up, because like my friend from Germany, they will awaken one day and find that the fanatics own them, and the end of their world will have begun.

Peace-loving Germans, Japanese, Chinese, Russians, Rwandans, Serbs, Afghans, Iraqis, Palestinians, Somalis, Nigerians, Algerians, and many others have died because the "peaceful majority" did not speak up until it was too late.

As for us who watch it all unfold, we must pay attention to the only group that counts – the fanatics who threaten our way of life.

Emanuel Tanay, M.D., is psychiatrist who lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

"Never again" or "Again and again"?

The Mumbai jihad attacks included the slaughter of Jews at the Chabad House. "Never again" could be called a Jewish mantra and some Jews have used it in response to the Mumbai jihad. [But if they adhere to the slogan "Never again," they show that they don't understand the Sunna of Mohammed.]

The Koran is the smallest part of the Islamic doctrine and it does not contain enough information to practice even one of Islam's Five Pillars. (When someone tries to explain Islam only on the basis of quotes from the Koran, they are ignorant about the true doctrine of Islam.) The Koran says over 70 times that all Muslims must follow the sacred example of Mohammed's words and deeds, the Sunna. The Sunna is not found in the Koran, but it is found in the Sira (Mohammed's biography) and the Hadith (his traditions).

The amount of information in the Sunna is amazing. Since Mohammed is the perfect example for all Muslims, the smallest detail of his life was recorded. We know how he went to the bathroom, brushed his teeth and had sex. We also know how he waged jihad.

So by the dictates of the Koran, Muslims are required to repeat the life of Mohammed over again and again. Therefore, they must know the Sunna. It is for this reason that all Muslims are Mohammedans.

Slaughter by the book

Now back to the Jews and their mantra, "Never again." Notice that this implies that you must know what has happened before if it is not to happen again. And while Jews may have catalogued and remembered wrongs from other enemies, the great majority of Jews do not have any knowledge about the Sunna of Mohammed as it applies to them. This is a great shame, because the slaughter of Jews at the Chabad House was done precisely according to the example of Mohammed.

For instance, the jihadists [in Mumbai] had to go out of their way to find the Jews. The same thing had happened to Mohammed. After Mohammed had attacked and destroyed all of the Jews in Medina, he attacked the Jews of Khaybar. He had to go 100 miles across the desert to get to the Jewish town. He sought them out. And just as the Jews of Mumbai had never harmed a Muslim, neither had the Jews of Khaybar harmed Mohammed.

The forensic physician who looked at the bodies of the Jews in Mumbai said that they were tortured beyond recognition. This is according to the Sunna. After Mohammed had attacked the Khaybar Jews, he knew that they had a buried treasure. He had the chief of the Jews staked out on the ground and built a fire on his chest to make him reveal the treasure. When the chief would not reveal the treasure by torture, Mohammed had him beheaded. The jihad of Mumbai was done by the book. It was pure Sunna.

Institution of slavery

It was at Khaybar that Mohammed instituted the Sunna of the dhimmi. The Jews of Khaybar were the first dhimmis (people subjugated by Islam). Before this, Mohammed had killed, enslaved and exiled the Jews. But Khaybar was a farming community and the Muslims knew nothing about farming. So after Mohammed took all of the Jews' money and land, he left them to work the land and pay him half of the value of their crops. This payment to Islam was called the jizyha tax.

Later the rules of dhimmitude included the fact that dhimmis were forbidden to study the doctrine of Islam.

Rabbi Holtzberg of Chabad House in Mumbai

Dhimmis were semi-slaves and had no civil rights. This is Sharia law.

At first Mohammed used the Jews as proof of his prophet-hood. After all, the same archangel who spoke to the prophets appeared to Mohammed. The first Koran, the one written in Mecca, contains many of the Jewish stories about Adam, Noah, Abraham and others. The plots are similar, but all the Jewish stories bring one message – God punishes all of those who do not listen to his prophets.

But Mecca had no Jews to refute him, so the Meccan Koran is favorable to the Jews, in general. Then when Mohammed moved to Medina, he found about half the town was Jewish. They told him he was no prophet and the Koran's attitude changed.

Before Mohammed died, every Jew in Arabia had been enslaved, murdered, assassinated, exiled or made a dhimmi. Two of his favorite slaves used for sex were Jews (the other was a Christian). Then on his deathbed he said that neither Jew nor Christian were to be left in Arabia. There are no Jews in Arabia today.

The Medinan Koran

The "Again and Again" people know this history; it is Sunna. The "Never again" people don't. Who will win? The answer is that knowledge is stronger than ignorance. Ignorance is the taproot of dhimmitude. "Never again" has no meaning if you don't know what happened before. There is a lesson here. He who has eyes, let him see.

Those who do not want to be dhimmis should educate themselves. The Islamic doctrine about the Jews can be found in *Mohammed, Allah and the Jews* by CSPI Publishing. An encyclopedic history of Islam and the Jews can be found in Andrew Bostom's definitive book, *The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism.*

WAIT! What about all those peaceful Muslims, the moderate Muslims? Only a few Muslims are killer jihadists. Remember that there are two Korans. The early Koran written in Mecca is more religious and favorable to Jews. The Koran from Medina is the one that rants and condemns the Jews and preaches the dominance of political Islam over all kafirs, non-Muslims.

These two different Korans actually contradict each other, but since both are from Allah they are both true. The Koran says that if two verses of the Koran contradict each other, then the later Koran is better.

Most Muslims follow the Meccan Koran, but since Allah said that the later Koran is better than the early Koran, they cannot condemn its practice. This explains why we don't hear "moderate" Muslims condemn the jihadists. The Medinan Koran trumps the Meccan Koran. The jihadist is a better Muslim than a Meccan Muslim.

Taken from the website: politicalislam.com

Christian education in Haiti: hope in the midst of despair

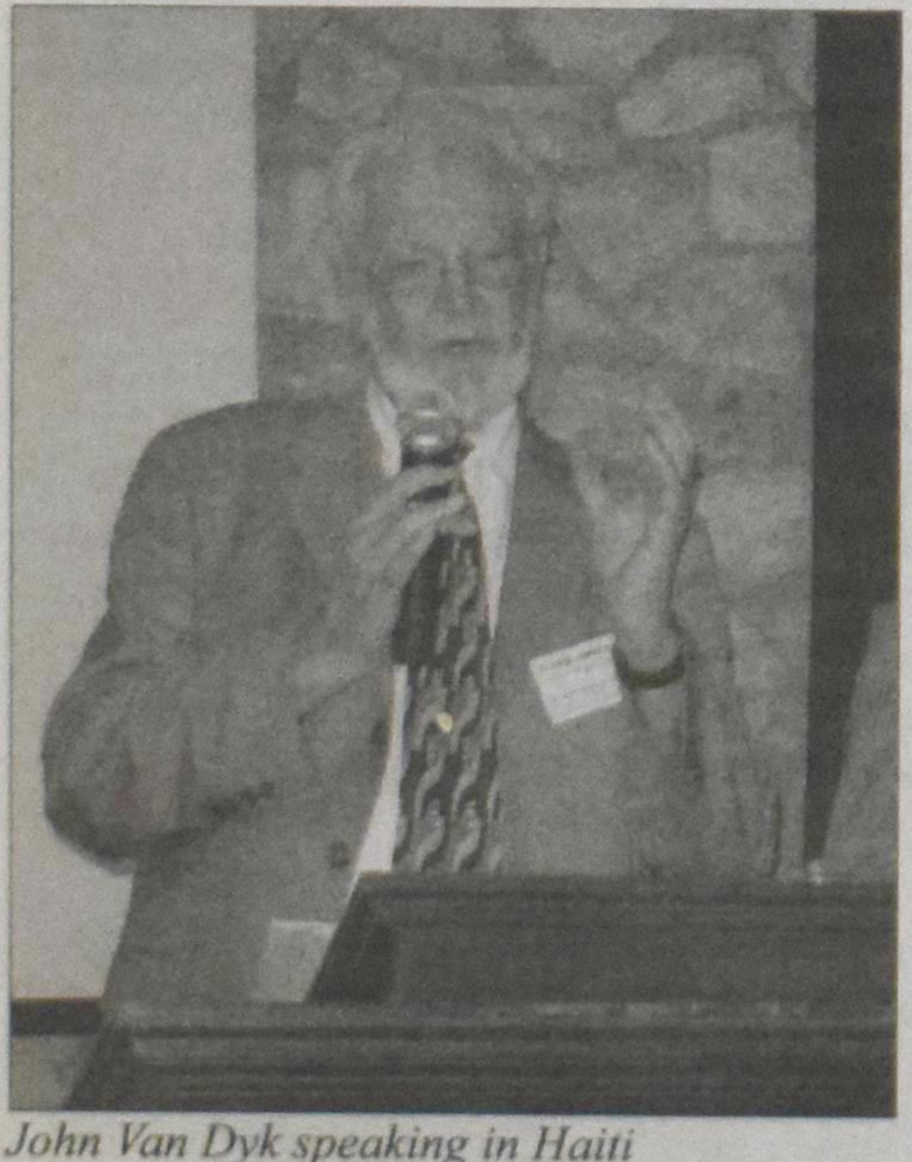
John Van Dyk

Haiti has been much in the news this year. And the news was not good. Surrounded by warm, blue Caribbean waters, this once beautiful country was hammered again and again by an unrelenting series of destructive hurricanes, exacerbating the misery of people already suffering in the throes of unbelievable poverty. The news of the recent collapse of a church-related school, killing nearly a hundred people – many of them children – brought another heavy load of grief.

Haiti is a small country, sharing the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic. It is rated as the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. More than 80 per cent of its eight million people live in poverty, most of them in what we may call abject, grinding poverty. The devastation occasioned by the recent hurricanes cruelly worsened what were already appalling conditions. Mudslides and widespread flooding have ruined much of the crop production. The awful results: shortages of food and starvation.

Effects of deforestation

In October I was privileged to spend some time in Haiti. I must say, the poverty there is about the worst I have seen in all my years of globetrotting. The infrastructure is completely dysfunctional. Electrical power and clean water are scarce. Without a high clearance four-wheel drive you don't get anywhere. Once the "pearl of the Caribbean," Haiti has been totally devastated by deforestation and habitat destruction and turned into a dump. Birds are rare – a disturbing experience for me, as I am an ardent birdwatcher. Unlike everywhere else in Middle America, I did not see a single vulture or swallow or swift in the sky. Instead of the tweeting of songbirds, only the crowing of a rooster woke me up in the morning. Little kids catch or shoot the remaining birds (even the very small ones) for food. I found it difficult to be in Haiti and not be overwhelmed by feelings of sadness and helplessness.



John Van Dyk speaking in Haiti

Signs of hope

Amidst all the despair the good news is the abundance of Christian schools in Haiti. There are hundreds and hundreds of them. Most of these are small, church-related, and plagued by lack of resources. During my stay in Haiti I worked with an organization called CRECH. CRECH stands for Consortium for the Reinforcement of Christian Education in Haiti. CRECH is connected to and supported by about 40 organizations. Currently its primary focus is on the development of curriculum to meet some of the educational needs of students in Christian schools throughout Haiti.

Besides providing consulting services, I had the opportunity to keynote the FORUM, an annual convention of Christian educators. Nearly 300 participants were in attendance, from all over the country. Given the difficulties of getting around in Haiti, the number of participants testified to the deep desire to promote Christian schooling.

As I see it, the Christian school movement in Haiti offers more than merely a glimpse of hope for this very poor, suffering country. Why? Because Christian schools in Third-World situations operate in such dire conditions that they cannot but have an impact on the societies in which they find themselves. Christian schools can serve as effective channels for the Gospel that calls us to make all things new. Christian schools can educate children who will grow up equipped and eager to address the needs of their society.

Challenges ahead

But the struggles are many. I mention just three. First, there is the monumental difficulty of keeping the schools functional. To do so requires, at least for now, a good deal of foreign investment. The risk is that such aid creates dependency. However, when carefully orchestrated, foreign assistance can lead to self-sufficiency.

Another major problem is the lingering dualism pervading much of Christian schooling in Haiti (and in most other places in the world, as I have discovered). Somehow a worldview that seeks to subject all things to the Kingdom rule of Christ does not yet prevail. The tendency is to restrict the Gospel to church affairs and a personal religion that orients the Christian life to the life hereafter. The key problem of dualism, then, is that it leads to world flight. Fleeing the world is a vision that has immense power to attract people in their powerless poverty. But it does little to improve their present situation. Much education will be needed to help the Haitians see that the pain of everyday life – the poverty, hunger, suffering and misery – is not something to be escaped, but to be confronted.

And finally, there is the all too common problem of division and discord among Christians. Ecclesiastical and theological disagreements, turf protection, power struggles, little kingdom building and personality conflicts are the order of the day, as they are almost everywhere else. The sad but obvious fact is that the splintering of efforts leads to ineffectiveness. If somehow the Christian education community can unite and become mobilized for action, the future of Haiti will look better than it does today. For that to happen, I fear, many more hurricanes will first have to come across Haiti.

John Van Dyk (drjohnvandyk@gmail.com) is Senior Member at Alta Vista Educational Services in Seattle, Washington and Sioux Center, Iowa.

Numbers at a Glance

- * Average life expectancy in Haiti is 52 years.
- * Under-5 mortality rate is 120 per 1,000 live births.
- * Some 3.8 percent of the population is believed to be HIV positive, among them 17,000 children.
- * Some 500,000 girls and boys are out of school and some 300,000 children live in domestic servitude.

Story

A Christmas Treat

Daphne Simpkins

Mildred Budge loved the scent of the cinnamon brooms sold in the floral department of her grocery store at Christmas time.

Miss Budge couldn't buy one and take it home, because the dense smell of cinnamon choked her and made her eyes burn. But for a passing few seconds pushing her grocery cart by the decorative brooms in the store, she could inhale and sniff – and let the cinnamony aroma take her backwards to previous shared Christmases and ahead to the next one which was a little different every year but always enjoyable.

Near to the cinnamon brooms were silk autumn leaves one could buy on stalks and use for decoration. Miss Budge liked them. Her hand caressed the yellows and browns and reds – colours too obvious to be real. Some people bought them and took them home and placed them in umbrella stands by the front door. Miss Budge didn't. She didn't need to own them. It was enough that the vivid silk leaves were there, and her hand could touch them as she passed by and confirm that here it was again: Christmas was coming.

Next to the stalks of decorative leaves were the first red candied apples sealed in the clear plastic forms that were impossible for her creaky hands to separate, but she didn't need to because at her age Miss Budge wouldn't risk breaking a delicate tooth on hard cinnamon coating anyway. But they were pretty – those candied apples, and someone would eat them, and it made Miss Budge happy to think that someone could enjoy the sharp tang of a Granny Smith apple in combination with the chewy cinnamon candy.

Around the aisle's corner – if not today, then soon – there would be shelves of baking goods: candied fruit, walnuts, pecans, evaporated milk, confectioner's sugar, vanilla extract, and, most likely, peppermint oil.

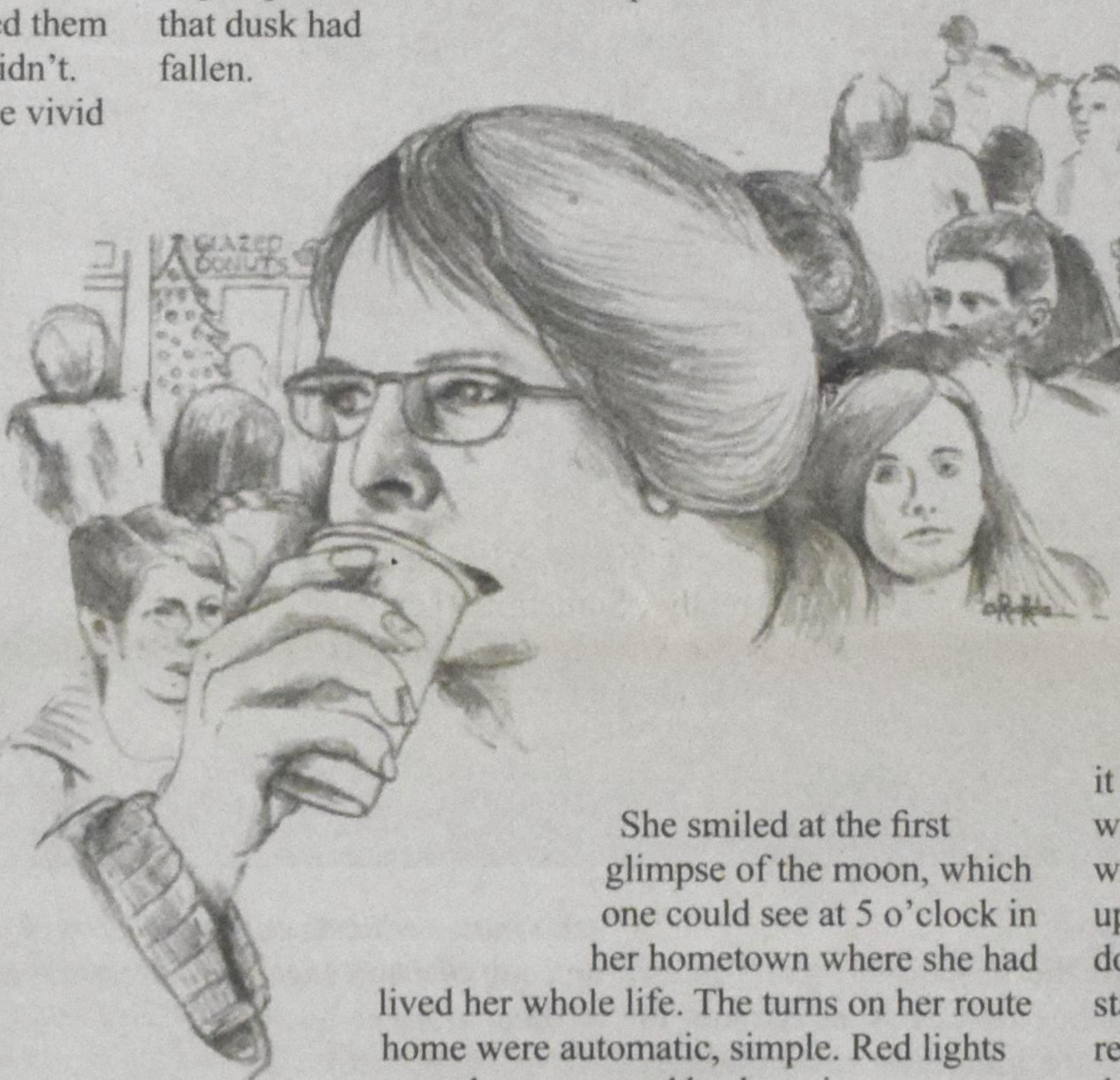
Miss Budge still stored a bottle of peppermint oil in her cabinet from a disastrous experiment two years ago of trying to make dark chocolate peppermint patties at home. The candymaking experiment had burned up her hand mixer. Worse, the candies were inedible – too thick from cream cheese that didn't blend. Something had been missing in the recipe, but Mildred Budge did not care enough about the mystery to try and solve it again. She loved peppermint patties, but she didn't need to make them again.

That wasn't true of other dishes. She had tried many times through the years to make her mother's signature sweet potato pie. But Miss Budge had not succeeded in the twenty years since her mother had passed away. Mrs. Budge's daughter took an odd comfort in failing in her attempts to duplicate that special recipe. The end result of her cooking experiments told the truth that no one could make her mother's pie for the holidays like her mother had baked them. The pang of loss was part of feeling at home during the holidays that contained that blend of sweet pain: true love and true loss, stillness in the midst of great activity, and a fulfillment in Jesus and a yearning for him that was a paradoxical truth of a Christian's life.

Through the years, Miss Budge had acclimated herself to that encroaching way of wanting and not having that didn't feel like loss, regret, or even loneliness. She had absorbed yearning into her daily life; its presence did not translate untruthfully into self-pity. She was not shortchanged. Satisfaction in what Jesus had supplied for her life was true; yearning for more of Jesus as her very life was also true. She found that the holidays were not the enemy to be conquered – as some warned in discussions about Christmas blues or Christmas giving and spending. Rather, wanting and not having, desiring and staying chaste in one's choices continued to become part of her growing tradition.

Miss Budge stopped in front of the dairy case and reached for a pint of eggnog. She would let herself have a night cap of two or three sips for as long as the pint of cold, nutmeggy mixture lasted. It would be enough for many nights of toasting the season while sitting under an electric blanket and peering through her front window at the wintry stars.

Satisfied with her purchases, she carried her small bag of purchases to the car, surprised that dusk had fallen.



She smiled at the first glimpse of the moon, which one could see at 5 o'clock in her hometown where she had lived her whole life. The turns on her route home were automatic, simple. Red lights turned to green and back again.

At the corner of the last intersection before Miss Budge steered toward her neighbourhood, she caught a glimpse of a red flashing light and her heart leapt up. She knew what the flashing red sign meant: Hot Doughnuts Inside Now.

Oh, to eat a hot doughnut instead of a bowl of corn flakes or soup for supper. She made a spontaneous right turn, and parked easily by the door of the doughnut shop. The nip of cold in the air brought a rush of pleasure to her eyes, and Miss Budge fastened the top button of her red wool coat and took her place in the stream of people who wanted hot doughnuts too.

Though people rspectfully turned to urge the older lady to go ahead of them, she declined. For Miss Budge, part of the pleasure of the season was to wait with other people in line for whatever they were all taking their turn to reach. The doughnut line moved slowly. Decisions were important and difficult, and there was so much to see: doughnuts with pink or chocolate or white icings and rainbow sprinkles and the very dear ones that had a small blink from which raspberry jelly oozed.

Miss Budge's hand pressed against her heart as she reveled in the color red – her preferred color above all others – but she would not buy the jelly doughnut. Raspberries got in her teeth. The glaze from lovely warm doughnuts did not.

It was too late in the day to eat more than one hot doughnut – too late in the day to drink hot black coffee, too. Miss Budge gulped and said, casting prudence aside, "Two hot doughnuts please and a cup of black coffee. Is it fresh?" she asked as wisdom attempted to seduce her to the mature choice of eschewing caffeine.

"It's always fresh here," the clerk boasted, spinning energetically to go to the backroom where the small iced hot doughnuts progressed slowly and majestically on the conveyor belt, sugar puddling and dripping all around them.

Another clerk poured Miss Budge's fresh-brewed coffee, snapping a lid on it as the retired schoolteacher paid out the money from her small black change purse. "Can you imagine me– drinking coffee this time of day?" she asked the clerk.

"I can," the clerk said with a conspiratorial grin. "Be careful. It's hot."

"I will be," Miss Budge promised, as the other clerk returned and offered Miss Budge the small white paper bag with her doughnuts. The doughnut lady leaned forward and whispered so that other customers would not hear, "I put a third doughnut in there – on the house. They're kind of small. But what's better than a hot doughnut dripping in sugar?"

"Absolutely nothing," Miss Budge replied honestly, taking her white paper sack and her cup of hot coffee and going, slowly, slowly – she loved people – past the line of smiling neighbours who were supposed to be at home by now but had been wooed off their routes, like Miss Budge.

Outside, the moon was higher and brighter than it had been fifteen minutes before. The sky was rich with red streaks of sunset and clouds that danced against what would become a darker sky. The wind had picked up, sharpened by a chill that had arrived as the sun went down, and Miss Budge stood there on the sidewalk, as stars pulsed into sight. Uncharacteristically impatient, she reached immediately inside the sack and found the free doughnut first to eat it while it was still hot. She took a warm bite of melting sugar that dissolved in her mouth like the delicate manna from heaven sent by God first to the wandering Israelites and which had shown up in so many different ways in her own long, good life. She offered a deep moan of gratitude for the gift of life every day, and ate the doughnut gloriously, without regret.

Then, snapping back the small lip of the coffee cup, she took a tentative sip – found it good – slurped three more times and then she realized that a small portion was often just the right amount. Miss Budge poured out the rest of the fresh coffee on the parking lot asphalt, like a love offering. Then, she offered another blessing for the chilly night and the bright stars and the sight of candied apples and the smells of cinnamon brooms and the satisfaction of hot doughnuts and the simple joy of spontaneous communion among fellow pilgrims that happened throughout the year, and even between seasons that were not yet wholly Christmas as it would be one day, ultimately. For every day contained the fulfillment and the yearning that was true in the life of a Christian; and every day of every season contained both the gift of Immanuel's abiding presence and that promise of the next time he will gloriously come.

Daphne Simpkins writes The Adventures of Mildred Budge, *a series of short stories about a veteran church lady. She can be reached at DaphneSimpkins@Prodigy.net.*
Drawing by Doug Roorda.

Journal of a Dutch immigrant (Part I)

Francis Ruiter

Francis Ruiter of Edmonton has published his memoirs, Journal of a Dutch Immigrant. *We have decided to publish three excerpts. In this excerpt Ruiter describes his early experiences in Canada, when he as a young single man arrived in northern British Columbia in 1948.*

My cousins, Pete Lieuwen and John Vriend, and I had left the Netherlands to make Canada our new home. We traveled by boat to Halifax and from there rode the train for seven days to British Columbia. Once there, I lived with and worked for my Uncle Peter Ruiter on his farm, while Pete lived with a cousin a quarter of a mile away and John worked for another cousin in the Lacombe area.

When I met my uncle in 1948, he was 62 years old. He had moved there in 1939, at age 53. He spoke with a heavy accent but understood the language well, because he loved reading. He read a lot of novels, although I don't recall there being a library.

My aunt was a frugal homemaker. She would make fresh coffee in the morning and serve the warmed-up leftovers in the afternoon. My uncle once remarked, "Do you have any of that slough water left?" He just accepted it. I thought it tasted horrible, but I, too, did not complain. She was a typical homemaker of those times – meeting all her husband's needs: physical, mental and emotional. She did not, however, work in the field, probably due to her age.

My cousin Carolyn was the only child still at home. Carolyn was a quiet, unobtrusive 19-year-old. She was not active in working on the farm either. After she finished helping her mother with the house chores each day, she went to her upstairs room and studied for her high school diploma. The local school only went up to grade nine, so she had to prepare for college by taking correspondence lessons.

She was happy to meet us male cousins. She had missed exposure to male friends, I surmised, because she was isolated from town and dependent on others for transportation. We got along well. She was instrumental in teaching me the rudiments of the English language. She would ask questions, and I would try to answer in English. Then she would rephrase my response and make me repeat it.

My work experience on the ranch was a real treat. My uncle farmed only a square-mile section of land, some of it still original bush. A lot of the work I was responsible for required my uncle's horses, which I really liked working with. Rather than endure the constant assault of a tractor's roar, I would hear the horses' snorts and laboured breathing and the creaking of their leather harnesses. I could watch their rippling muscles and smell their sweat. But horse exhaust failed to tickle my nose.

What I liked best was go horseback riding and play cowboy on the range. It was my task after supper to bring the cows in from their grazing on crown land adjacent to our farm. A few of the cattle wore cowbells for easy tracking, and the horse I was riding was trained to chase a wandering cow or steer. Once pointed in the direction of a stray cow, he would flank the cow, forcing it to get back in line with the herd heading for the farmyard.

Pete, a rather high-strung horse, could easily throw you out of the saddle if you were not alert. Once, while inspecting a field of Timothy grass and clover for obnoxious weeds from atop Pete, I called out "Whoa!" rather enthusiastically. Pete stopped alright, but he did it so fast that I slammed forward and mashed my testicles against the saddle horn. I was paralyzed by the pain and could only slither out of the saddle and lay on the ground, waiting for the pain to subside. The horse looked down at me with bleak eyes as if he wanted to say, "You told me to stop!"

I loved the outdoors – the chirping of birds flying by and the rich smell of the fields. I would often come across field mice, rabbits, and, occasionally, a deer or a coyote. Sometimes I encountered even larger, more dangerous animals. I remember one such unexpected visit after I had learned to use the tractor. As I was driving along, I saw a figure in the distance, obscured by the dust swirling about me. I thought it was my uncle coming to see how I was doing. When I got closer I realized it was a black bear, standing on its hind legs to watch me as I drove in his direction. I stopped the tractor to unsheathe the knife from my belt in case I needed it. The bear, however, was not interested enough and soon sauntered back into the bush. I guess he was drawn out by the sounds and smells emitted by the tractor.

Another time, I had been sent to fix a fence in a remote part of the ranch. I'd gone on foot and, when I finished fixing the break, I decided to take a shortcut back through the bush. I had only gone a short distance when a great noise came my way. A large moose came crashing through the brush and rushed past me. What could have startled this animal into such a hasty flight? I looked to my left and there, under a large pine tree, about a hundred feet from me, a big black bear sat on his haunches sniffing the air. I froze in my tracks, wondering whether he was in a defensive position or whether he was sniffing the air for prey. One thing I knew: I had to get out of there! I dropped my tools, tiptoed a short distance, then ran the rest of the way back to the ranch as fast as I could. I arrived trembling and exhausted.

I enjoyed working with my uncle. We milked a few cows in the morning, then fed the four horses and harnessed them for the day's work. Haying, although it was demanding in terms of strength and endurance, was one of my favourite tasks. Cutting the grass with the horse-drawn mower was no hardship. After cutting, the grass was left to dry in swaths for a few days. Then we would rake it together and heap it into small piles. After letting it cure for a few more days, we would load the hay onto the "hayrack" – a wagon with wheels made of wood and rimmed with iron that could hold about a ton of hay. A team of horses pulled it to the barn where the hay was loaded into the loft with a rope, a pulley, and a fork-like grabbing tool. It would take four lifts – powered by a team of horses – to empty the hayrack.

One day we were transferring hay from a wagon to the haystack, right beside the bull's corral. This bull had served a cow that morning and was now bellowing for dear life. My uncle suddenly blurted out, "What is the matter with you? Why don't you shut up? You just had the time of your life this morning, so now quit your complaining!" My uncle had a somewhat stern demeanor and a generally pessimistic disposition, so when his sense of humour pierced the gloom, I would roar with laughter.

As I said, it was demanding work. Sometimes it was very hot in the hayloft, but I was young and strong and let the sweat pour down freely over face and body. My uncle, being over 60 years old, would let me do the heavy work. To load the hayrack, I would pitch up the hay to him on the wagon and he would adjust the load. Once, when I pitched a heavy bundle of hay up to him, he remarked, "Francis, take it easy. You might not last the day." I chuckled to myself and drove the pitchfork even deeper into the pile of hay to show my strength.

Such was my work and play on the farm in 1948. With harvest over and winter approaching there was little farm work left to do. It was time to find other employment in the forest industry.

Journal of a Dutch Immigrant

1948-2008

Francis Ruiter

Loevestein

My Ancestral Home

Author Donna Dawson writes: "Francis Ruiter allowed me to see through his eyes, the Holland of the war years, a simpler more beautiful life where family was centred around a love of God. In his brusque and tongue-in-cheek way, Francis has opened a wonderful door to the past for future generations.

Journal of a Dutch Immigrant

can be ordered for $24.00

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Email address: francisruiter@shaw.ca.

Environment

Flowers & Thistles
Curt Gesch

There's something missing here

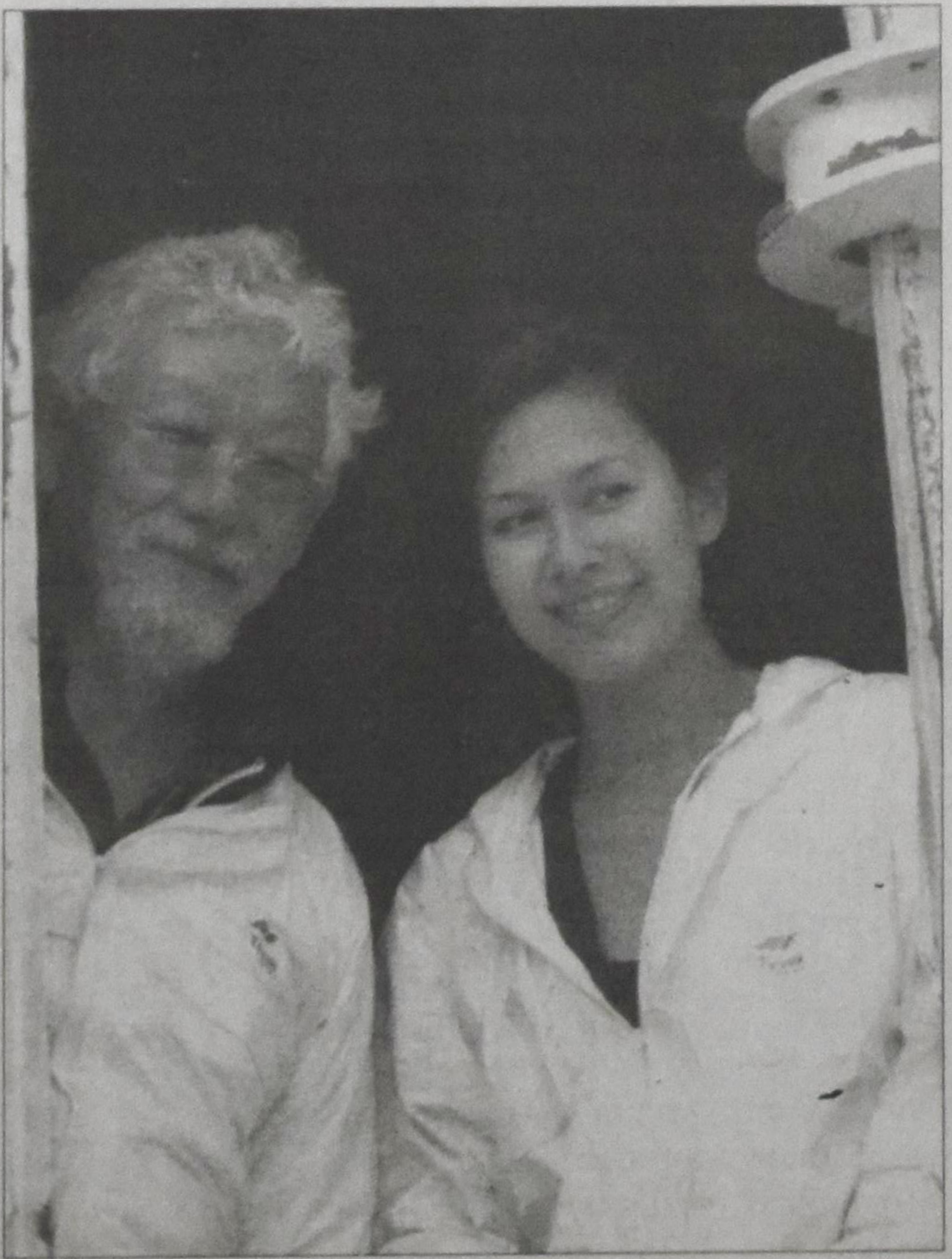
Last night my wife and I watched a fascinating CBC show called "The Suzuki Diaries." David and his daughter, Sarika, were filmed during a tour of Europe, a tour that celebrated the environmentally sustainable practices already in place.

Dr. Suzuki repeatedly talked about how – in the "old days" – when his daughter was growing up, he used to rant and rave about this-and-that being all wrong and having to change.

He began to re-evaluate his approach when his daughter gave back the message that "nothing I can do will change things anyway" and "things are hopeless." Now, Suzuki remarks, he is more interested in celebrating healthy moves towards a sustainable future.

(I wondered if the Suzuki Foundation or the CBC would sponsor me to go on a tour to Europe with my daughter, Becca, if I promised to admit to *my* past hyper-critical attitudes. We could visit the historic churches that I roundly criticized when I taught her church history, compare the quality of grey partridge hunting in Protestant and Roman Catholic areas of Hungary, check out the status of Britain's few remaining hedgerows and evaluate the pheasant hunting there, visit Balmoral Castle to ameliorate my condemnation of the royal family, and see how Prince Charles has worked to improve the red deer hunting opportunities – sustainably – there, and so on. And – like the Suzukis – find time for a little fishing. I'd prefer brown trout fishing in Croatia, I think, in Marshall Tito's former private stream.)

Sariki and David Suzuki watch the start of the wind turbine in Denmark.



Many questions

That little bit of envy aside, I would like to mention something that I didn't see in "The Suzuki Diaries": the integration of human life with nature. Windmills are fine, but the question of wreaking havoc on migratory birds is still a moot point. A farmer makes methane from hog manure, but the only shot of the hogs were in a confinement program. The new Reichstag is powered, in part, with vegetable oil – canola. But we saw no fields of canola resting in a landscape that included woodlots, small shaws, hedgerows, or underbrush.

Supertrains whizzed us through the countryside, but too fast to spot even an individual tree. And the stations were remarkably barren places. Where were the planters, the terraces such as on Robson Square in Vancouver? European plazas must be the most barren places for wildlife (except for "Blue," the ubiquitous pigeon and his infinitely recyclable kin). There are few trees (except maybe a couple in big pots), and fountains; no creeks (man-made or otherwise). What there *is*, is this: stone, stone, and more stone. As a lover of stone buildings, they appeal to me; as a lover of architecture, the plazas overwhelm me with admiration. As a lover of Genesis two, the plazas leave me cold.

The exception in this tale of Suzuki-woe was the vineyard which was farmed using bio-dynamic agricultural methods. The integration of cattle and grassland with vineyard was heartening. I didn't see any cover crops between the vines such as some sustainable, organic vinedressers are using in the southwest U.S.A. Nor did I see a hedgerow. I did see some sort of fabricated wall, either stone, or something else equally geometrical.

New world models

All that said, I do agree that celebrated successes is a refreshing change from doom-and-gloom forecasts. I would argue, however, that the German, Danish, French, and Spanish interviewees could well benefit from a return visit to parts of the New World in which wise energy consumption and appreciation for wildlife go hand in hand. I would have loved to see a European equivalent of the Don and Marie Ruzicka farm near Killam, Alberta (see *Western Catholic Reporter,* Oct. 27, 2007), for example, or – to use older examples – Arthur Ericson's Vancouver Law Courts or Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin in Spring Green, Wisconsin. Better yet, a guided tour the Town of Dunn by Calvin DeWitt, the Calvinist environment studies professor from Madison, Wisconsin.

Or a European visitor could simply visit some of the remaining CROP (land bank) reserves in South Dakota to see how nature flourishes when not managed to death, flourishing in close proximity to the most modern of agricultural practices.

A visitor might also visit some New World cities in which large populations find virtual jungles at their doorsteps. They might visit Central Park in New York or see the red-tailed hawk nests on "villa" balconies feeding on rats, squirrels and pigeons. They might visit Hamilton, Ontario, and see that paradise is no further away than Coot's.

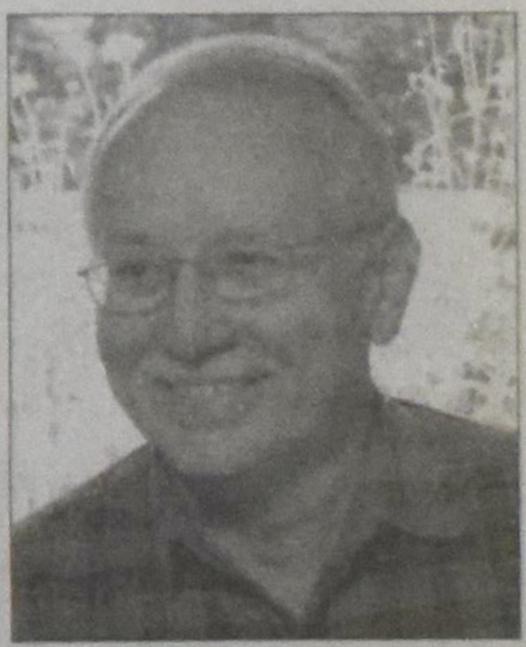
Conditional praise

Many Canadian newspapers carried reviews of "The Suzuki Diaries" that reflected Greg Joyce's view (*Canadian Press*):

* [Suzuki shows himself] "an optimist."
* "It's very, very late, but you have to have hope."
* "The Suzuki Diaries, environmental messages aside, is also a gorgeous travelogue."

David Suzuki's European tour revealed much about the man, his family, his change in approach. But the beautiful and hopeful examples he fills leave something out: a relatively balanced ecosystem in which human existence is part of a diverse ecosystem, not one that is simplified-to-death.

In my mind, there is a great deal that is *right* about Suzuki's more recent celebratory approach. But in the European scenes he presents, there is so much . . . well, not exactly *wrong*, but *missing*.



Curt Gesch lives on a farm in Quick, B.C. He would gladly seed those overly neat plazas and train tracks with yellow sweet clover. (curtgesch@hotmail.com)

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Reflections

Gloria in excelsis deo!

Gloria in excelsis deo! Several Christmas carols contain that phrase, the favorite being "Angels We Have Heard on High."

Glory. The angels utter glory to God for sending a Saviour, born in Bethlehem of a young mother who had the thoughtful personality, the integrity, the Spirit-driven commonsense to quietly ponder that *Gloria*; to carefully think on all she (and her husband) had learned from the unexpected visit of those shepherds who told an amazing story about her Son, no doubt lingered, then disappeared into the night rejoicing.

The proper response to angels glorifying God is to join them: when the angels had gone back into heaven, and the shepherds had seen the frail object of that glory, they "returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they bad been told" (Luke 2:20).

We Reformed people talk a lot about "glorifying God." He deserves our adoration every day, in all we do, in every way. That's a heartily biblical concept. But how do we do that?

It starts with acknowledging God's own glory. We must confess that *glory* is at the core of God's holy being and name.

Why is God so self-preoccupied?

We may ask (though not out loud): Why does God need to be so focused on himself? We'd prefer him to be **fixate** on us, in the manner that we dictate. Any human being that self-preoccupied we would call a megalomaniac. So why isn't God?

John Piper asked and answered that very question last month for the Evangelical Theological Society. The opening of the Westminister Catechism – "What is the chief end of man? ...To glorify God and enjoy him forever" – Piper turned on its head: "The chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy displaying and magnifying his glory forever." He added, "God is the most God-centered person in the universe, God is uppermost in his own affections, he has no other gods before himself, and he is jealous to be known, admired, trusted, enjoyed, and obeyed above all others."

That's what the Bible reveals of him. Then ask yourself: "Do you feel most loved by God because he makes much of you, or because he frees you to enjoy making much of him forever? If we are God-centered simply because we consciously or unconsciously believe God is man-centered, then our God-centeredness is in reality man-centeredness. Teaching God's God-centeredness forces this issue of whether we treasure God because of his excellence or mainly because he endorses ours." God glories in himself because he is God, *the* God who created us and all creation for his glory, says Isaiah (43:7). How can being centered on and in *that* God diminish us?

Spectacular and deadly

The Bible uses the word *glory* (and the verb form *glorify/give glory*) hundreds of times. All but a few are tied to God: his presence, his acts, his name, his "God-centeredness."

Sometimes God allows his glory to be human-eye visible: "The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai.... To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain" (Ex. 24:16,17). The glory of the LORD is both spectacular and deadly. "When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by," God tells Moses after the prophet had boldly asked, "Now show me your glory" (Ex. 33:18).

Govert Flinck: Angels announcing Christ's birth to the shepherds *1639*

God also had to hide his dazzling-deadly glory for Israel's sake, via a cloud, lest they look on God and die: "Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.... Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."

Only after animals spilled their blood for sin offerings and burnt offerings, after atonement was made for the people, could God allow them to see his glory. We who know Israel's Messiah as our atonement are far more fortunate. Says Paul, "We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Pagans can reveal God's glory

God seldom makes his glory physically visible to us fragile fallen creatures. But he wants us to understand that everything he does, every blessing, and his ultimate saving act of sending his Son radiates his invisible glory. He even sometimes reveals that glory through unregenerate human beings as well as through his elect. God tells Moses, "I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in [to the Red Sea] after [Israel]. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen" (Ex.14: 17). God "gains glory" through recalcitrant Pharaoh because "the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD" (v.18). God gets glory when he is revealed as the LORD, the one and only.

Jesus, the glory of God the Father

This brings us back to Christmas, to the glorious manifestation of Christ Jesus, God-in-flesh. Isaiah prophesied, "Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. *And the glory of the LORD will be revealed*, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

The Messiah of Isaiah's prophecy was himself the revealing of God's glory. But he also healed the sick and even raised the dead so that God's name would be glorified. (When we wrestle with God over the physical healing of a person modern medicine assumes is chronically or terminally ill, the best "argument" we can posit to God is that such healing will bring glory to God's name, both in the healing itself and when the person healed, and his or her family, friends and church, proclaim that healing among themselves and to unbelievers as a mighty act of God.)

As Jesus "set his face to Jerusalem," he knew he was about to be the sacrificial Lamb for our sakes. But what he said was, "The hour has come for the Son of Man *to be glorified*." Glorified not in death itself but in his perfect obedience to the will of the Father. Jesus then asserted that if we love our lives we will lose them, but assured, "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. *Father, glorify your name!*"

We know what happened. "Then" – Jesus got an immediate answer from the Father – "a voice came from heaven: 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again'" (John 12: 29).

We have seen his glory, we continue to see it, and we shall see it some day in all its spectacular fullness – then with no hint of the deadly in it. When the Child who was born, the Lamb who was slain, comes in power and great glory, when the old things have passed away, when all things become new and we inhabit the new Jerusalem, "the city will not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the *glory of God will give it light*, and the Lamb will be its lamp" (Rev. 21:23). *Gloria in excelsis Deo!*

Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ by John Piper is a helpful, joy-eliciting little book, now or any time of year. Marian will send a copy, no charge, to anyone who gives her their name and address via email or by contacting *C.C.* until she runs out of copies. Her book *George Frideric Handel: A Music Lover's Guide* is also still available. Order from WordPower Publishing.com, amazon.ca, or call Marian at 1-877-693-4469. *A blessed Christmas to you all.*

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier *from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY. She may be contacted by email at: mvantil@roadrunner.com or via her website: www.wordpowerpublishing.com*

Reflections/ Review

Ending the year with Vanier

Getting Unstuck
Arlene Van Hove

For years I have admired Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche, the community for the disabled. In his book "On Being Human," he shares many insights on how working with the disabled can help the able-bodied get in touch with their own humanness and how through this process we learn to accept ourselves.

Lately, I have been thinking how applicable some of Vanier's insights are in terms of caring for our "late aging" parents or other loved ones. For sure, the journey forces us to get in touch with our humanness. Social scientists believe looking after aging parents is becoming a "rite of passage" for the boomers. Still, most of us are unprepared to deal with the raw emotions that underlie our identities, our relationships and our spiritual beliefs.

The skid zone

For myself, I will admit I have been living in The Skid Zone lately. It's a place were adult children of aging parents try to work out how best to care for aging and vulnerable parents. Theorists warn siblings of the pitfalls of living in this zone because it is notorious for destroying even the strongest bonds of sisterly or brotherly love. Of course, I understand the skidding. Where else do we find a neighbourhood in which we come face to face with our own egoism, anguish and fears? Where else are we forced to tackle questions such as "are we willing to rise to the challenge, do we know what we are in for, what is it going to cost us, and how will it affect my life?" And where else are we so blatantly tossed into the pot of obligation or opportunity (however we want to perceive it) to ultimately work out the highest expression of *who* we are and *how* to fulfill the age-old mandate – to give and to care?

"And all of this has to be processed through the pea brains of eleven of us! (ten siblings plus myself)" I once exclaimed exasperatedly to my spouse.

But when all is said and done, I never thought I would one day feel awkward and lonely for being "homespun" and wanting to keep on marshalling the troops to continue caring for our mother at home.

"It must have been the flower power years of the 60's and the 70's," I said dejectedly to my spouse recently. "I think I was the only one in my family to burn my bra and demonstrate against the Vietnam war at the Peace Arch border." I continue, glancing at him.

"Or..." he says slowly, lifting his left eyebrow – he does this when he wants to give me a reality check – "...you are still suffering the consequences of whiffing the weed when you were demonstrating."

"Doubt it, and that is what I have in common with Clinton," I retort, "We both never inhaled."

And so, with Christmas and the year coming to a close, I have decided to stray from expounding tidbits about healthy functioning, and give the floor to Jean Vanier's writings on "community" (feel free to add "family") to give ourselves a break.

Excerpts on the right to be a rotter

He writes: "I have always wanted to write a book called "The Right to be a Rotter." (me too!). A fairer title is perhaps, "The Right to be Oneself." (Because) one of the great difficulties of community life is that we sometimes force people to be what they are not: We stick an ideal image on them, to which they are obliged to conform. We then expect too much of them and are quick to judge or to label.

If they don't manage to live up to this image or ideal, then they become afraid they won't be loved or that they will disappoint others. So, they feel obliged to hide behind a mask. (or they leave the community) Sometimes they succeed in living up to the image; they are able to follow all the rules of community. Superficially this may give them a feeling of being perfect, but this is an illusion.

In any case, community is not about perfect people. It is about people who are bonded to each other, each of whom is a mixture of good and bad, darkness and light, love and hate. And community is the only earth in which each can grow without fear toward the liberation of the forces of love, which are hidden in them. But there can be growth only if we recognize the potential, and this will never unfold if we prevent people from discovering and accepting themselves as they are, with their gifts and their wounds. They have the right to be rotters, to have their own dark places, and corners of envy and even hatred in their hearts. These jealousies and insecurities are part of our wounded nature. That is our reality." (orig. from "Community and Growth (1989), reprinted in Jean Vanier: Essential Writings.)

In short, when we get together as families or communities this month, let's go easy on ourselves and accept one another's right to be a rotter! And if we think about it, is that not what Christmas is about?

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca.

A University for the People

(A History of the Institute for Christian Studies, Robert E. Vander Vennen, Dordt College Press, Sioux Center, Iowa, 273 pages, $18.00 US.)

Reviewed by Morris Greidanus

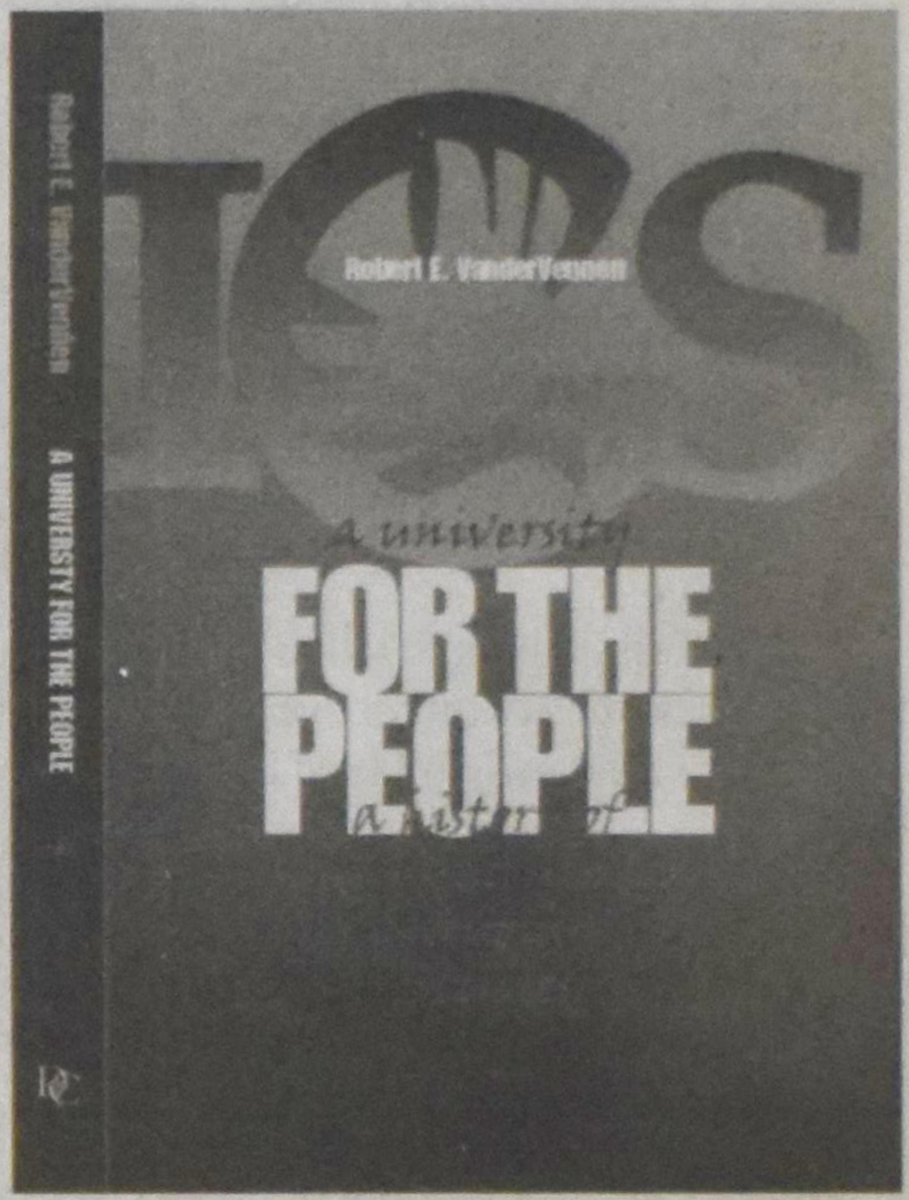
Just when the older generation has almost forgotten the turmoil and excitement of its beginnings and a younger generation hardly knows its existence or its worth, Robert Vander Vennen comes with this fine history of the Institute for Christian Studies' first 40 years. Although Vander Vennen writes from the inside – he held strategic administrative posts for 27 of these 40 years – this is not an in-house fluff piece, but a frank, appreciative, critical, yet friendly look at this fascinating "graduate school with a difference."

Vander Vennen relates the beginnings of the Institute in the 1950s as Reformed Dutch immigrants with a debt to Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd and with stubborn convictions about "the unification of faith and learning" and "the biblical integrality of all of life" – summed up later by Evan Runner in the phrase "life is religion" – form an Association for Reformed Scientific Studies (AARS, later AACS) to build a Christian university to equip people for service in their new country. He takes us from this grand vision to the small start with lectures, conferences, one professor, and unrecognized degrees to the present with a respected faculty, a diligent student body, degree granting powers, and a building across the street from the University of Toronto.

Lots of detail

Showing his roots as professor of chemistry, Vander Vennen nicely classifies and subdivides the 40 years under categories such as: The Institute Opens, Growth and Turbulence in the Early 1970s, the Professors and their Courses, The Rough Road of Controversy, Finances, Institute Appraisal and Influence. This yields some duplication, in book listings for example, but provides an orderly look at the various aspects of the Institute's birth and growth.

The Educational Creed of the Institute is here (p.265), as well as a discreet explanation of the name change (p.11), the Women's Action and its little coin banks (p.19), a two page summary of the Philosophy of the Law idea (pp.37, 38), and a full listing of the professors and the courses they taught/teach (ch.5). The book is brightened up by four pages of pictures and by a number of sidebars on folks, like Glen Andreas, Francois Guillaume, Gerald VandeZande, Jan & Jane DeKoning, who were part of the beginnings. Fittingly, the Association's first chairman Peter Speelman also gets a nice sidebar, even though he left when he disagreed with its initial focus on one philosophy. As the history of the Institute unfolds, organizations like Wedge Publishing, Patmos, The Curriculum Development Center, and the *Vanguard* also come to our attention again.



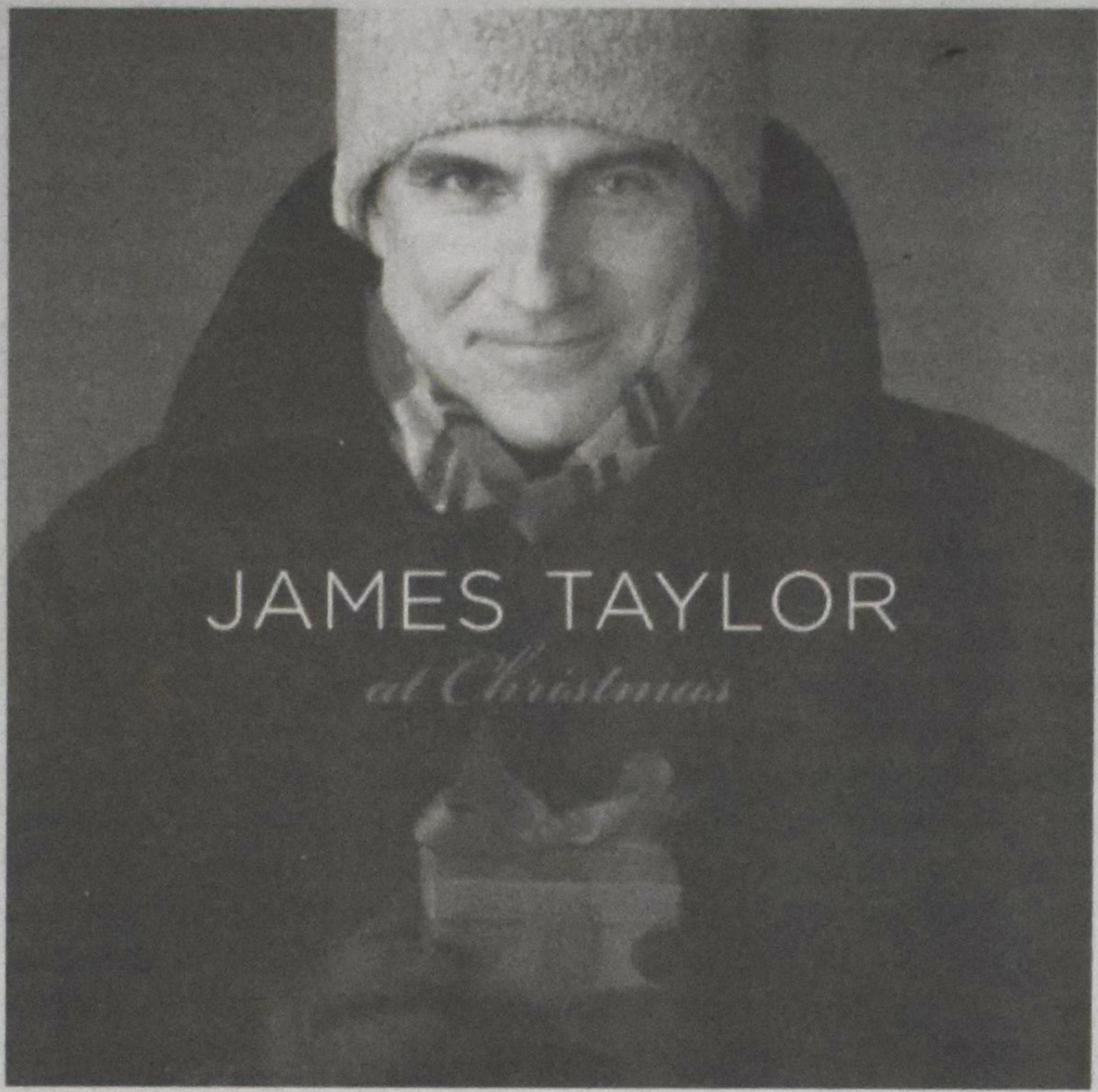
Persistent and fragile

Vander Vennen describes the agony of various disagreements fairly – almost too personally in some spots. But through controversy, overwork, and many long discussions the Association learns what it can and cannot do, focuses its work on the graduate school and becomes the Institute for Christian Studies. The bureaucratic twists and turns on the long road to accreditation yield an intriguing story of persistence and gradual recognition of the Institute's rightful place in the academic world. The chapters on Development and Finances explain why graduate education is non-profit with a vengeance: it is not carried by undergraduate tuition as in most universities. Steady members and generous donors have kept the Institute going with small and very large gifts. However, finding dependable funding through endowments and grants remains the challenge for the Institute and the people it serves.

For those who have seen the Institute from its tender and tough beginnings to its still fragile, persistent functioning today, this history alerts us to the contribution that the Institute for Christian Studies has been allowed to make to Christian scholarship and to people in Christian service in many places. For those who have hardly heard of the Institute, this is an engaging story of a mustard seed miracle right under our noses.

Morris N. Greidanus is a retired CRC pastor, who served as ICS's interim president in 2005/6. The office of Friends of ICS, the US foundation that supports ICS, is staffed by his wife Alice and is located in their home.

Top 10 Christmas Albums



Reviewed by Brett Alan Dewing

1. A Christmas to Remember (Amy Grant)

All of Grant's Christmas albums hold their fair share of treasures, but this one gives lavishly with a tree full of sonic presents like the title track, "'Til the Season Comes 'Round Again", "Christmas Can't Be Very Far Away", and "Christmas Lullaby (I Will Lead You Home)." There is a sad, sentimental, and contemplative spirit around the recordings for this album, and they instantly transport you to a fireside on a snowy night with loved ones beside you. This is the perfect listen for anyone who can't be home on Christmas Eve.

2. At Christmas (James Taylor)

James Taylor has never really been on my radar, but when I heard this album play at the music store I worked at, I knew it would become part of my Christmas mindscape from then on. Taylor's smooth voice tumbles over melodies like a child on a toboggan. His duet with Natalie Cole on "Baby, It's Cold Outside" refreshens an overplayed song by perfectly capturing the playfulness of the lyrics. Check out "Some Children See Him" and Joni Mitchell's "River".

3. It's Christmas (Mandisa)

As the most recent release on my list, this one had to really stand out to get this far up in the ranking. I have always enjoyed the former American Idol contestant, but until now she's been missing something: perhaps the comfort and professionalism of a seasoned artist. But she's arrived with this immensely danceable string of truly joyous takes on old classics. Every track feels fresh, and there's a true tingle in listening to Mandisa's voice ebb and flow in exactly the right places.

4. The Christmas Album (Gladys Knight & the Pips)

You haven't heard "'Twas the Night Before Christmas" until you've heard it read by Gladys Knight in jazz jive rhythm backed by tone poem orchestrations and, of course, the Pips. Standouts on this collection include two "Ave Maria"s and a very loosely-related Gospel medley thrown in for good measure. Listening to Knight's interpretations of Bach and Schubert reminds me of Aretha Franklin's entrancing soul take on "Nessum Dorma".

5. Happy Christmas, vol. 2 (Various Artists)

This compilation of rock carols may seem dated a decade later, but it's pure Christmas to me, with the edge missing on most Christmas albums. This one is great in shuffle rotation with the rest of your Christmas collection, adding a little jab to the mood at just the right intervals.

6. Wishing for This (Leigh Nash)

Have you heard the news? Sixpence None the Richer is officially back together with a Christmas album (The Dawn of Grace) and a stellar EP (My Beautiful Machine). But while they were disbanded, singer Nash recorded this gentle contemporary holiday disc. Her voice is always a pleasure, but it's the song choice that shines here. Several original tunes make a claim for posterity, and the cover of "Hard Candy Christmas" has become one of my favourite Christmas tunes.

7. The Twelve Days of Christmas (Burl Ives)

To me, Christmas music should be played on a real turntable and feature the likes of Steve Lawrence and Johnny Mathis. This 60s LP only treats us to one voice, but it's the incomparable mellow warmth of Mr. Burl Ives. You'll never find this collection of songs anywhere else, from "The Seven Joys of Mary" to "Down in Yon Forest", and "The Friendly Beasts" to "Jesous Ahatonia". Relax and trust Burl.

8. Happy Christmas, vol. 3 (Various Artists)

The last installment of the "Happy Christmas" collection takes a largely darker turn. It was this album that introduced me to Denison Witmer, showcasing himself well with the achingly beautiful "A Christmas Song". It was also one of the first places I heard Bleach, a band that always did markedly better with their more contemplative fare, such as "What We Call Christmas." Even the annoying Relient K sobers up with "I Hate Christmas Parties" by side project Matthew Thiessen and the Earthquakes. These three tracks are well worth any price, each a true game changer. Unfortunately, there are some serious clunkers along for the ride by the likes of the real Relient K.

9. Christmas: An Irrational Season (Carolyn Arends)

Carolyn Arends rarely goes astray, and this collection of mostly original pieces is no misstep. Anyone who questions the intellectual element of Arends's music should check out her two exceptional books. Those smart and spirited fingerprints are all over this disc, which gets its name from a quote by Madeline L'Engle, which is also set to music by Arends.

10. The Promise (Michael Card)

This album would make it to any list by virtue of "What Her Heart Remembered" and "Joseph's Song", a pair of gorgeous songs reflecting Mary and Joseph's respective contemplations on the birth of Christ. Luckily for us, all the other tracks are as beautifully and classically Card as well.

Brett Alan Dewing is feature editor of Christian Courier.
His email: brett@christiancourier.ca

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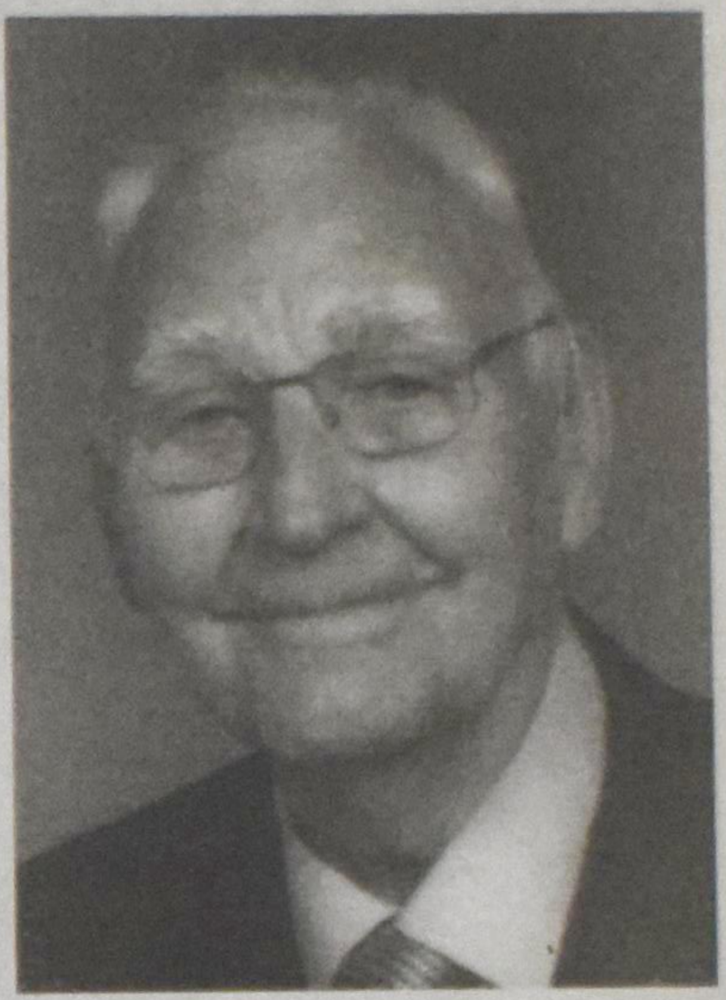
Obituary

Tjeerd (Tom) Reitsma

(November 6, 1922-December 3, 2008)

After a brief illness,
on Wednesday, December 3, 2008,
Tom went peacefully to be with his Lord.



Tjeerd was the loving husband of Thelma (Witvoet) for 30 years. He was predeceased by his first wife Johanna (denBok) of 32 years (1977).

He was father to Bob and Helen, to Helen (predeceased in 2003) and Syd, Ynze, Bette and Henry, Marge and Harry, and Wilma Joy. He was Opa to many grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and a brother-in-law and uncle to the denBok, Reitsma and Witvoet families.

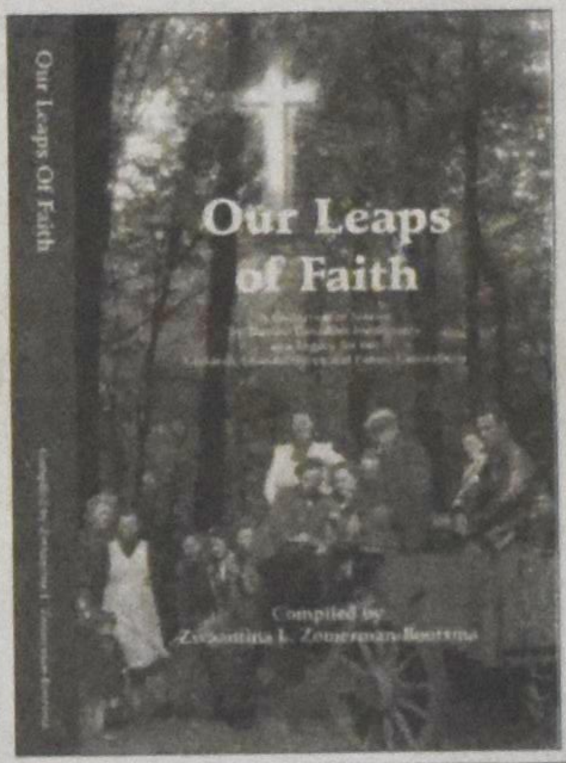
Tom was an active member of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church, Hamilton, for 40 years and a member of Westmount Christian Reformed Church, Strathroy, for 10 years. Tom was trained as a landscape architect and gardener; he retired from McMaster University as Grounds Supervisor in 1984.

The Funeral Service was held in Strathroy on Monday, December 8 at 10:00 a.m. with Pastor John Koole officiating. Interment took place in Woodland Cemetery, Burlington, at 3:00 p.m.

One of Tom's favourite Bible passages was Psalm 8: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Tom and Thelma saw that majesty and acknowledged it as they traveled throughout Canada and the United States.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Canadian Cancer Society.

Condolences can be sent to the Reitsma family via bette346@gmail.com, or by regular mail to Thelma Reitsma at 133 - 400 Dominion Street, Strathroy ON N7G 3G8.



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Trenton Christian School
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Website:
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Smithers – CFBV	9:15 am	1230
Vernon – CJIB	9:30 pm	94

ALBERTA

Brooks – CIBQ	8:30 am	1340
Edmonton – CJCA	6:00 pm	930

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Winnipeg – CKJS	9:00 am	810

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Atikokan – CFAK	9:30 am	1240
Chatham – CFCO	6:30 am	630
Hamilton – CHAM	7:30 am	820
London – CKSL	7:00 am	1410
Owen Sound – CFOS	7:00 am	560
Sarnia – CHOK	7:30 am	1070
Stratford – CJCS	8:45 am	1240
Wingham – CKNX	10:30 am	920
Woodstock – CJFH	7:30 am	94.03

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Saint John – CHSJ	9:00 am	94.1

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Liverpool – CKBW	7:30 am	94.5
Kentville – CKEN	8:30 am	1490
Middleton – CKAD	8:30 am	1350
Shelburne – CKBW	7:30 am	93.1
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BRITISH COLUMBIA
Prince Rupert CIAJ 100.7 FM .... Sat. 10 am

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Steinbach CHSM 1250 AM .... Sun. 4 pm

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Bridgewater CKBW 1000 AM .... Sun. 5:30 am

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Oshawa CKDO 1350 AM .... Sat. 8 am
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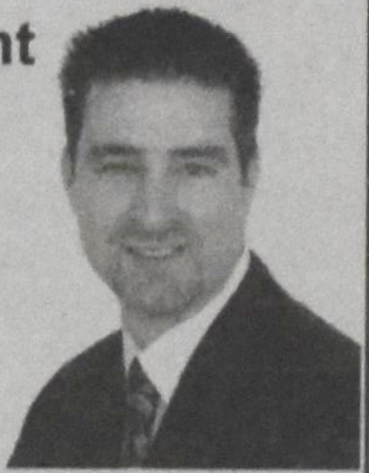

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Dec 19 The Ambassadors and Ladies Advent Singers are guests at The Holland Christian Homes annual participating Christmas concert at 7:30 p.m. Offering for HCH's broadcast ministries.

Dec 20 The Liberation Choir 5th Annual Christmas Sing-a-long Concert with the Steeltown Orchestra. at 7 p.m. at St. Giles United Church, Main St E & 85 Holton Ave S, **Hamilton**.

Dec 21 Liberation Choir Georgetown/Salvation Army Christmas fundraiser Charity Concert 7 p.m. Georgetown Christian Reformed Church, 1161 Trafalgar Road, **Georgetown**, ON

Jan 25, 2009 - Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching.

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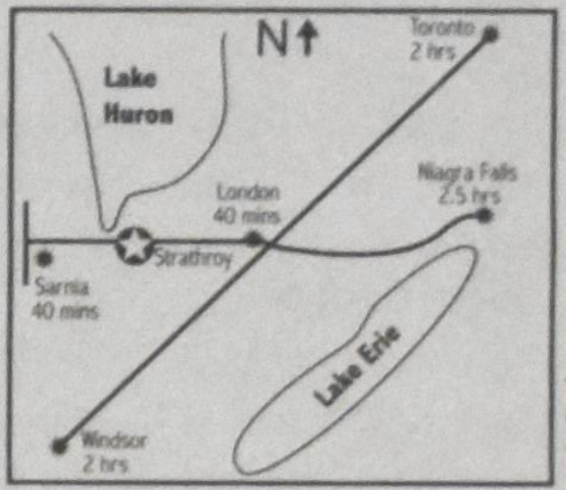

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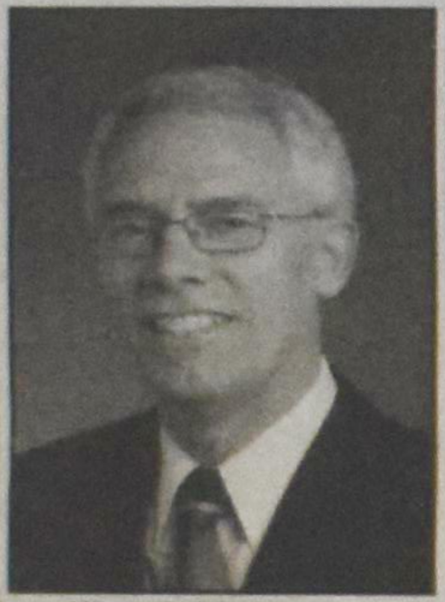

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William Spoelhof dies at 98

GRAND RAPIDS, Michigan (Calvin College) – Dr. William Spoelhof, a member of the Calvin College community for eight decades, has passed away. Spoelhof was president of Calvin from 1951 to 1976, but his association with the college first began in the fall of 1927 when he journeyed from his hometown of Paterson, New Jersey, to begin his studies at Calvin.

He graduated Calvin in 1931, taught as a professor of history and political science from 1946 to 1951 and then was called at the age of 42 to become president of his alma mater.

After retiring from Calvin in 1976 he remained a visible figure on campus, maintaining regular office hours, conversing with students, socializing with fellow faculty members and enjoying a wide variety of campus activities, including varsity sports.

Constant allegiance

Current Calvin president Dr. Gaylen Byker was a student at Calvin when Spoelhof was president and became a close friend of Spoelhof's since becoming president in 1995. He says faithfulness was a hallmark of Spoelhof's life and legacy, noting that one of Spoelhof's favourite songs was a Dutch hymn whose title is translated as "Faith Can Never Expect Too Much."

"He was a consummate scholar, leader, manager and Christian role model," says Byker. "His involvement very much shaped the college we know today as a leader in Christian, liberal arts education. He was thrust into the presidency and performed with great integrity and effectiveness for a quarter of a century. On a personal level I will miss his friendship, his wisdom and his counsel a great deal."

Former Calvin president Dr. Anthony Diekema agrees. "President Spoelhof was a gentleman, a scholar and a statesman," he says. "Christian statesmanship was a hallmark of his leadership in higher education. He was a giant of a man on whose shoulders, by the grace of God, I was privileged to stand."

Diekema also notes Spoelhof's playful side. "He was a man of good humor and quick wit," he says, "and this was often revealed through his love for word games. He was a master of the pun, both as detector of unintended ones and often as creator of those intended."

Major development

Spoelhof's quarter century tenure as Calvin's president was marked by the college's move from its location on Franklin Street in Grand Rapids to the current Knollcrest campus.

Once college and church official made the decision to purchase what at the time was known as the Knollcrest Farm for the then-princely sum of $400,000, the quartet of Spoelhof, Henry DeWitt, John Vanden Berg and Sid Youngsma raised money for and oversaw construction of new buildings, recruited faculty, expanded programs and, building on the foundations laid by previous faculty and administrations, put into place the framework for Calvin's current place on the higher education landscape as one of the country's best Christian colleges.

Social persona

In a 1999 interview with *Spark*, the magazine for alumni and friends of Calvin College, Spoelhof reflected on his role in the life of the college over the years. He spoke about his love for Calvin students, saying: "I like very much to meet students and enjoy talking with them. I like to find out what their goals in life are, what courses they're taking, what difficulties they have." He also spoke about his love for his fellow emeritii, with whom he had coffee daily at 10 a.m. in a place affectionately called "The Emeritorium."

"We seldom leave before we've learned something new and different," he said. "I mean, sometimes it's just plain trivia; sometimes it's a deep philosophical or theological thought; sometimes it's just plain jokes. But usually there are gales of laughter that come out of that room and kids walking by look in to see what's going on. I usually sit in the corner. I can keep an eye on who's going into the library and who's coming out."

Focus on programs

The building of the new Knollcrest campus will always be a significant legacy for Spoelhof, but interestingly when he reflected on the work undertaken by the college in the 1960s and 1970s to build Knollcrest, he reflected not so much on buildings, but rather on programs.

"We talked about the curriculum that was going to be taught in that building," he said. "For example, when discussing the Science Building we said, Look, we've never had astronomy before. We've never had geology before. They had been considered too expensive and dangerous. But they belong in our curriculum. So we had to answer the questions: What is the relationship of laboratory to the formal teaching? How essential is it? What is its place? After we put this together in one simple folder for each building, we'd hand it to our architect Bill Fyfe and say, Now wrap the building around this. That's the way the campus was developed."

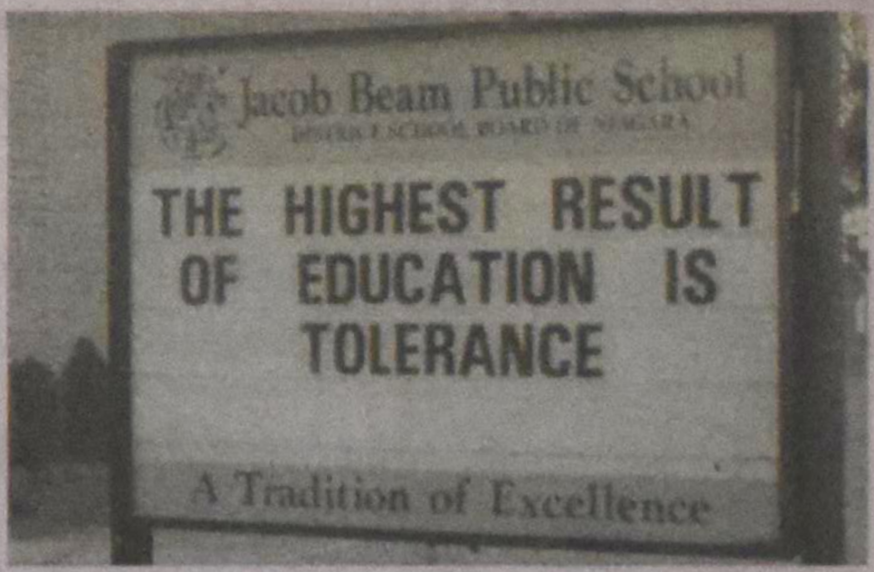
That development continues today as Calvin's campus has blossomed into a 400-acre jewel at the corner of Burton Street and the East Beltline in Grand Rapids. And among the first buildings visitors to campus encounter as they enter the campus from Burton Street is the William Spoelhof College Center.

Picture: *Dr. Spoelhof standing and listening to the carillon being played on campus this Fall. He is standing with his friends (Dick Gootjes on his left, and Darlene Meyering directly next to him on his right, and next to her Dick's wife, Carol Gootjes).*

A 'sign' of the times

Bert Witvoet

BEAMSVILLE, Ontario – One of my church friends, Rick Jongejan, took the picture that accompanies this article. He sent it around to a few of his friends. I, in turn, asked some people I knew what they thought of this sign. Here are the results.



Rick Jongejan says:

"Multiculturalism has gone so far that city hall cannot have signs that say 'Merry Christmas.' Rather, they need to say 'Happy Holidays.' Everything needs to be politically correct. It is interesting that many schools have zero tolerance for bullying in schoolyards. We have zero tolerance for drinking and driving. So what does this public school in Beamsville mean with its baffling sign? I can only guess. Probably we need to tolerate all races in our society. As a Christian I believe we do not have to tolerate everything. I do not think we should absolutize tolerance."

Stan de Jong says:

"The sign sucks; another typical example of our so-called politically correct society. The highest result of education is to prepare young men and women intellectually to take their place in God's world, to love God and neighbour, to tolerate no evil and to learn to be lovingly intolerant."

Bert den Boggende says:

"While I think that for the public school system tolerance is an important aspect (also for Christian schools), I don't think it should be the highest result. As far as I am concerned, schools are still academic institutions and that implies much more than tolerance. Before pope Benedict became pope, he wrote a book about tolerance. It's not an easy read, but those who put up the sign might have benefitted from reading it. How tolerant are the public schools when it comes to Christian perspectives? At times I have encountered some quite intolerant teachers who rabidly opposed Christian schools. How can intolerant teachers teach tolerance? As far as I can determine, tolerance is a by-product and how can a by-product be the highest result?"

Harry Antonides says:

"Tolerance used to be a good thing in that it meant to be accepting of people of different colour, religions, and habits. But that was when certain necessary virtues were generally respected, such as courtesy, good sense, and communal responsibility.

What it now has come to mean is that everyone can design his own standards or 'values,' while denying that there exists one overarching, transcendent standard of truth. Multiculturalism, that is, relativism has now become the guiding principle of public policy in Canada. The irony now is that in the name of tolerance a new kind of intolerance is adopted so that it is considered wrong, if not illegal, to express negative views about abortion, same sex marriage, radical Islam, and a host of other politically incorrect topics."

This is but a small sampling of what was said in response to the sign. Although I do not claim to have a personal relationship with a Roman Catholic bishop, I did find the following appropriate comment on the Internet.

Archbishop George Niederauer says:

"Tolerance, respect, and trust are always two-way streets, and tolerance respect and trust often do not include agreement, or even approval. We need to be able to disagree without being disagreeable.... We need to stop hurling names like 'bigot' and 'pervert' at each other."

(*Taken from his archdiocesan newspaper,* Catholic San Francisco, *about reconciliation after the passage of Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriages.*)

So there you have it. I was told that Jacob Beam Public School has changed its sign since the picture was taken, something they do on a regular basis. It now reads: "It's nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice." Whoever is in charge of putting statements on the school's sign sure seems to have a penchant for kindness.